

**Social Identity and Crisis Communication:
A Case Study at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki**

Suvi Järvinen

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Author or authors Suvi Järvinen	Group or year of entry 2010
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Teacher(s) or supervisor(s) Sirke Lohtaja-Ahonen	
<p>The purpose of this thesis was to research email crisis communication and its effect on the social identity of an organization's employees. Social identity is an individual's sense and knowledge of being part of a group. It is a central paradigm in the social psychological theory known as the "social identity approach."</p> <p>As crisis communication has never been researched from the viewpoint of social identity, a theory for crisis communication that supports social identity was developed in this thesis. This theory was developed on the basis of previous crisis communication and social identity theories. This new theory was used in analyzing crisis communication.</p> <p>The objective of the thesis was to research how the U.S. Embassy Helsinki internal crisis communication via email is used as a tool to create and strengthen the social identity of Embassy employees. The objective was to find out how Embassy employees perceive crisis communication, especially the elements that pursue to strengthen social identity. In addition, the thesis aimed at researching whether such crisis emails have an effect on the social identity of Embassy employees.</p> <p>To achieve these objectives, a text analysis and a survey were used as research strategies. The text analysis was used to research U.S. Embassy crisis-related emails. The purpose of the text analysis was to research the content of and rhetoric used in the emails which might strengthen employees' social identity. The survey was used to research employees' opinions on crisis communication, as well as their social identity.</p> <p>The results showed that employees' social identity is in a clear way attempted to be created and strengthened in crisis emails, e.g. by portraying a positive vision of the future and using the "rhetoric of we." Some employees perceive such crisis communication as increasing their respect for their working community, as well as their motivation towards work. The perception of crisis communication is connected with the salience of social identity. However, the causality of these two variables cannot be ascertained on the basis of this study.</p>	
Keywords Crisis communication, social identity, email	

Johdon assistenttityön ja kielten koulutusohjelma

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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia sähköpostitse tapahtuvaa organisaation sisäistä kriisiviestintää ja sen vaikutusta organisaation työntekijöiden sosiaaliseen identiteettiin. Sosiaalisella identiteetillä tarkoitetaan henkilön käsitystä kuulumisestaan tiettyyn ryhmään. Sosiaalinen identiteetti on keskeinen käsite sosiaalipsykologian tutkimusperinteessä nimeltä sosiaalisen identiteetin lähestymistapa.</p> <p>Koska kriisiviestintää ei ole tutkittu sosiaalisen identiteetin lähestymistavan näkökulmasta aikaisemmin, työssä luotiin teoria sosiaalista identiteettiä tukevalle kriisiviestinnälle. Teoria luotiin kriisiviestinnän aikaisempien teorioiden ja sosiaalisen identiteetin lähestymistavan sovelluksien pohjalta. Työssä luotua teoriaa hyödynnettiin tutkimuksessa kriisiviestinnän analysoimisessa.</p> <p>Työn tavoitteena oli selvittää, millä tavoin Helsingissä sijaitsevan Yhdysvaltain suurlähetystön sisäisellä, sähköpostitse tapahtuvalla kriisiviestinnällä pyritään luomaan ja vahvistamaan yhteisöön kuuluvien henkilöiden sosiaalista identiteettiä. Tavoitteena oli selvittää, millä tavoin lähetystön työntekijät kokevat kriisiviestinnän ja erityisesti ne erityispiirteet, joilla sosiaalista identiteettiä pyritään luomaan. Lisäksi työn tavoitteena oli selvittää, onko kriisiviesteillä vaikutusta työntekijöiden sosiaaliseen identiteettiin.</p> <p>Tutkimusmenetelmiä oli kaksi, tekstianalyysi ja kyselytutkimus. Tekstianalyysissa tutkittiin Yhdysvaltain suurlähetystön sisäisiä, kriiseihin liittyviä sähköpostiviestejä. Analyysi koski viestien sisältöä ja retoriikkaa, jotka mahdollisesti vahvistavat työntekijöiden sosiaalista identiteettiä. Kyselytutkimuksella selvitettiin työntekijöiden suhtautumista kriisiviestintään sekä heidän sosiaalista identiteettiään.</p> <p>Lähetystön kriisiviesteissä pyritään luomaan ja vahvistamaan työntekijöiden sosiaalista identiteettiä muun muassa viestimällä positiivisesta tulevaisuuden visiosta sekä käyttämällä me-retoriikkaa. Osa työntekijöistä kokee tällaisen kriisiviestinnän lisäävän työmotivaatiota sekä arvostusta työyhteisöä kohtaan. Sillä, miten kriisiviestintä koetaan, on yhteys sosiaalisen identiteetin korostuneisuuteen, mutta näiden syy-seuraussuhdetta ei voida tämän tutkimuksen puitteissa päätellä.</p>	
Asiasanat Kriisiviestintä, sosiaalinen identiteetti, sähköposti	

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to see how social identity is attempted to be created and strengthened in the U.S. Embassy Helsinki email crisis communication. The goal is to find out how the Embassy employees perceive crisis communication, and whether there is any connection between crisis communication and the employees' social identity. Social identity is an individual's sense and knowledge of being part of a group, and it is a central concept in a social psychological paradigm known as the social identity approach. In my thesis I will research and discuss U.S. Embassy crisis communication and analyze whether it has an effect on the social identity of U.S. Embassy staff members. I will research U.S. Embassy internal, crisis emails and find out whether the way in which crises are informed about has an effect on how U.S. Embassy employees perceive themselves as part of the U.S. State Department community. The commissioning party of this thesis is the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki and the target group of research is the staff of the Embassy.

The theoretical framework of this paper consists of two themes; crisis communication and social identity approach. Firstly, crisis communication is discussed in general, followed by discussion about crisis communication and crisis management, as well as effective crisis communication. Secondly, social identity approach is applied to crisis communication by looking into the viewpoints of organizational behavior and communication. The social identity in crisis communication is also discussed. The social identity approach has not been applied to crisis communication before, and there is no ready-made model of crisis communication from the viewpoint of social identity. The social identity approach gives psychological explanations to already existing crisis communication models and adds new aspects to the field.

1.1 Background

I began working at the Embassy of the United States of America in Helsinki as an intern in the August of 2012. The 5-month internship was part of my degree and I completed it in the Commercial Section of the Embassy. The function of the Commercial Section, or Commercial Service, is to promote American interests and facilitate U.S.

company exports by developing relationships with Finland through Finnish government and business (International Trade Administration). During my internship I was part of the Commercial team and assisted in all Commercial Service activities.

During my work placement at the Embassy I quickly realized the peculiarity of U.S. State Department communications. As a government, as well as on a national level, the United States are constantly subject to threat and minor and major crises occur seemingly often (U.S. Department of State 2008, 2). Especially political institutions, such as U.S. Embassies can also be considered somewhat threatened. The employees of all U.S. Embassies around the world are updated on these crises, alongside other events, regularly. An important channel of information distribution internally is email. As I was a member of the embassy community during my internship, I, too, received informing emails on a daily basis. Some of these messages regarded different crises, such as the Sandy storm and the attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya in autumn 2012. What I found interesting about these emails was that even though the employees in Finland were not directly affected by these crises, everyone was informed about them nevertheless. A notable observation was also the compassionate but simultaneously professional style of the emails, which first got me to consider crisis communications as the topic for my thesis.

1.2 Scope and Objectives

In my research I will concentrate only on U.S. government internal communication. I will not look at any information the Embassy or the U.S. State Department has directly given out to the public, as this would broaden the topic too much. However, the content of some of the emails sent as internal communication can be public. I will base my research on written material, which consists of emails sent to Embassy staff to inform about crises. Even though these emails have been sent to other U.S. Embassies around the world as well, I will only do research on how the emails have been received in the Embassy in Finland. In this work the emphasis is on researching the Embassy employees' sense of belonging to a group. Consequently, I will not discuss the role of individuals as group members or the process of a person joining a group in this work. In this

thesis I will concentrate on analyzing communication during the crisis response phase as well as post-crisis communication.

The objective of this thesis is to find out how the internal crisis-related emails affect U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees. The aim is to find out what kind of language and elements are typical for U.S. government crisis messages and how the social identity is pursued to be created and supported through email communication. The social identity approach is applied to crisis communication and discussed how social identity is conveyed in the crisis emails. I have set the following three research questions for this thesis:

1. How is the sense of “we-ness” and belonging to the common group (i.e. social identity) conveyed through U.S. State Department internal, crisis-related emails?
2. How do the employees feel about the email crisis communication and themselves as belonging into the U.S. State Department community?
3. Is there a connection between how the employees feel about the crisis communication and how they sense their belongingness?

The first research question will be answered especially in chapter 4, in which I analyze the Embassy’s crisis communication by email from the perspective of the social identity approach. The second and third question will be answered in chapter 6.

I hope that my research will be of use in assessing and planning communication and crisis management not only in embassies, but in organizations of any kind.

1.3 Research Method

This thesis is a research-oriented thesis. The research method is not purely qualitative or quantitative. The research method is mainly qualitative, but some of the results can be analyzed using a quantitative method. Even though the qualitative and the quantitative method can be separated as their own methods, they can both be applied to a sin-

gle research. The qualitative and quantitative analysis can also both be used in analyzing the same research data (Alasuutari 1995, 32).

As the research strategy for this thesis, a text analysis and a survey is used. The text analysis is done by analysing emails regarding crises sent to Embassy staff. The main focus of the text analysis is to study crisis emails in order to find possible elements of language which support and strengthen the group members' social identity. The survey is used in order to research the Embassy staff's thoughts on the crisis-related emails and the way social identity is attempted to be created in them. The survey also pursues to research the Embassy staff members' social identity and how it is affected by the crisis-related emails.

2 Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is considered a specialist area of organizational communication (Cornelissen 2011). This is because crises are occasions that stand out from day-to-day contingencies; crises have the potential to damage an organization's reputation, relationships with its stakeholders and threaten the organization's existence altogether. The aim of crisis communication is to exert control. It is common for organizations to have plans for how to communicate in case a crisis occurs. However, some crises, such as natural disasters, cannot be prevented or planned for in advance. All crises require the organization's will to communicate effectively and responsibly in order to limit any negative consequences (Cornelissen 2011, 199–200).

A crisis is a turning point in the life cycle of an organization (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2011, 3). It can be a change for the worse as well as for the better. The way in which crises are communicated and informed about is crucial. Crisis communication thus has a remarkable role in defining the direction an organization takes when it faces a dangerous turning point such as a crisis. The purpose of this chapter is to define crisis, crisis communications and crisis management and to discuss crisis communication practices, including effective crisis communication. In addition, the chapter discusses crisis communication as an opportunity.

2.1 Crisis Management and Crisis Communication

In order to define crisis communication we first need to define crisis. The term crisis has various definitions and there is no one, universally accepted definition (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 18). A crisis can be defined as an event that threatens the organization's tangible resources, such as people and property, or intangible resources, such as credibility and reputation (Juholin 2009, 299; Argenti 2007, 213). It is a unpredictable and/or unexpected event that creates uncertainty and can seriously impact an organization (Ulmer et al. 2011, 7; Coombs 2007, 2–3). Traditionally, a crisis has been perceived to have only negative outcomes but recently it has been seen rather as a turning point that presents the organization with both threats and opportunities (Ulmer et al. 2011, 7). One way of classifying crises is dividing them into two

categories; intentional crises and unintentional crises. Examples of intentional crises are terrorism, sabotage and poor risk management, whilst unintentional ones can be natural disasters, disease outbreaks or downturns in the economy (Ulmer et al. 2011, 11).

Crisis communication can be defined as the measures taken by an organization to communicate with its stakeholders when a crisis occurs. An organization communicates continuously in different ways and through different channels. Every now and then exceptional events and issues emerge, which require special consideration regarding communication. An example of an occasion of this nature is a crisis. Even though crisis communication is classified under the general term of communication, it has emerged as a distinct discipline due to its specialist nature. The purpose of crisis communication is to, through communication, lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis (Lehtonen 2009, 10). It is also important to understand that effective crisis communication does not eliminate the crisis, but rather makes it possible for the organization to continue its operations successfully despite of the crisis.

Many times crisis communication is only understood as communicating during a crisis. This does not, however, describe the process very well, as communicating is only a single factor in combatting a crisis. Instead, the broader term crisis management is more often used (Juholin 2009, 299). The purpose of crisis management is to combat crises and lessen the damage induced by preventing the negative outcomes a crisis may generate, and protect the organization (Coombs 2007, 5). The term crisis management thus describes the process in a better way. Hence, it is not sensible to separate crisis management and communication and neither is communication a separate function. If anything, communication is an essential part of coping with a crisis (Juholin 2009, 299). Coombs and Holladay (2012, 17–18) further underline the importance of the use of correct terms by arguing that the terms crisis, crisis management and crisis communication are inseparably connected. They propose that the terms should be considered in progression from crisis to crisis management to crisis communication.

Crisis management can be seen as three interrelated factors (see e.g. Juholin 2009, 299). They are preparation, response and revision. Communication-wise we talk about preparation as pre-crisis communication, response as crisis communication and revision as post-crisis communication. Millar & Heath (2004, 6) portray a crisis as having two dimensions: technical and communication. By the technical dimension, physical actions taken in order to lessen the damage caused by a crisis is meant. An example of this could be a company withdrawing lethally faulty consumer products from the market. The dimension of communication, on the other hand, shifts the attention to what needs to be said before, during and after the crisis. All of the three stages are important should an organization want to defeat the crisis with honour. Failing to communicate in a certain manner during each of these phases could result in serious damage to the organization.

In this work, the focus is on analyzing communication during the crisis and after the crisis has occurred. It is, therefore, appropriate to define these phases in detail. Communication during a crisis, the crisis response phase, is the stage where the crisis has already flared up. In the crisis response phase it is critical for the people in an organization to comprehend that a crisis exists and to respond to the occasion as a crisis (Coombs 2007, 19). The way in which an organization communicates during the crisis response phase has a considerable effect on the outcomes of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 28). In fact, effective communication during the crisis can lessen the damage caused to an extent where the organization can continue its operations in a normal manner.

The point where the crisis response phase ends and the crisis is considered to be settled, post-crisis communication commences. In the post-crisis communication phase the attention is not anymore on managing the crisis, but rather on managing the effects of the crisis. Of course it can be challenging to pinpoint the ending of a crisis, hence it can be said that post-crisis communication is a natural continuum to crisis response phase, only adding communicating about learning from the crisis (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 45). The purpose of post-crisis communication is to prepare the organization for a possible future crisis, ensure the stakeholders feel positive about the

crisis management efforts of the organization and to make sure the crisis certainly has ended (Coombs 2007, 19).

The channels of communication have developed rapidly during the last few centuries. New mediums appear and the old ones are replaced by new, virtual ones. Communication technology is a yet regenerating and fast-developing area in the 21st century. Consequently, the development of communication technology has shaped crisis management as well. The advancement makes it easier and faster to transport information and to communicate in crisis situations. Due to the internet, the world has also become smaller. Something happens in North America and minutes later the whole of Europe knows about it. Because of the fact that crises are generally newsworthy occasions, they are likely to be reported. It is consequently unlikely that a crisis will remain unearthed, which is why it is yet more important for organizations to have impeccable crisis communication skills should they want to be successful.

The popularity of email has grown rapidly. Email has become one of the most significant channels of communication inside organizations. In addition to general exchange of information, email can be used as a means of crisis communication. It is important to contact everyone who is affected by the crisis, even if it is a large number of people. To do this, email is one good tool. The significance of communicating with compassion, concern and empathy in case of a crisis should also be acknowledged (Ulmer et al. 2011, 51). This is exceptionally important in written communication, such as emails, because a major way of conveying a message is through words. In written communication, the message receiver cannot see the sender's facial expressions or body language. In addition to mere words, the layout of the message; fonts, pictures and colors, also add to the message content.

It makes a difference in written crisis communication if the receivers are addressed with compassion and concern for their welfare. This is not unprofessional, but rather shows excellent skills in crisis management and leadership. In addition to the emotional side, crisis communication is recommended to be quick and open. Moreover, crisis messages should be taken care to craft and send in a form that they can be clearly and

easily understood (Coombs 2007, 128). The basic factors of persuasion – credibility, emotion and reason – also apply to crisis communication by email (Larson 1989).

When we talk about organizational communication we usually mean all communication an organization engages in, in general; written and spoken, physical and virtual, internal and external, one-way and two-way. Because the term communication is so broad, it may be confused with informing. Not long ago the two terms actually meant the same thing. Burrus (2012) suggests that it is important to see the difference between communicating and informing. While informing is static, one-way and does not necessarily cause action, communicating is engaging, two-way and always prompts action. What we call crisis communication can also be what should really be called crisis informing. Communication is something that happens vertically and horizontally inside the organization. Communication means that information is being interchanged between executives and subordinates in all directions. Informing, on the other hand, usually happens vertically and often from the up downwards. In this work I will use the terms crisis communication and crisis informing interchangeably.

2.2 Effective Crisis Communication

In order for crisis communication to be effective, certain matters need to be taken into account. There is a bulk of literature on crisis communication listing various factors that make crisis communication effective. Many of the factors are overlapping, which means they could be simplified. I have concluded the factors in three, these being the content, rhetoric and spokesperson of crisis messages. The content is the actual message, the rhetoric means the way in which messages are conveyed and the spokesperson is the person who conveys the message. To simplify even more, the three factors can be summed up in the form of questions “what?,” “how?” and “who?” Each of the factors can easily be analyzed using the social identity approach, further discussed in chapter 3. All of these factors will be demonstrated in the following sub-chapters.

In addition to these three factors, it is worthwhile mentioning the consistency of communication, i.e. sticking to a certain style in crisis communication. However,

consistency is tightly interlinked with all of the factors, including the content, rhetoric and selection of the spokesperson, which is why they should not be considered separate factors. In order for crisis communication to be effective, it needs to be consistent. Consistency in communication builds credibility, while inconsistency creates confusion and gives an impression of incompetent crisis management (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 29). The consistency in the style of the messages gives the public, as well as the employees an image of trustworthiness.

Before moving on to the factors accounting for effective crisis communication, we should look into what is meant by effective crisis communication and by what means can crisis communication be considered effective. Firstly, a self-evident requirement for crisis communication to be effective is that the recipients must understand the message. Secondly, what proves that the message has been understood and adopted is the recipients' subsequent action as desired by the message sender. The effectiveness of crisis communication can also be measured by the believability and persuasiveness of the message (Coombs 2007, 144). The persuasiveness of the message can lead to stakeholders believing in the organization and wanting to fight with it despite the crisis. Restoring the faith of the stakeholders also accounts in securing the organization's bright future. All the factors contributing to effective crisis communication, as presented in the following sub-chapters, aim to the same goal; persuasiveness of crisis communication.

2.2.1 Content

Crises are often seen as merely bad and dangerous situations that seriously threaten an organization and without exception cause grave damage. Although this sometimes is the case, there is a possibility for a crisis to be an opportunity. As discussed above, a crisis is a turning point for an organization. The turn, consequently, can be for the worse or for the better. Ulmer et al. (2011, 211) argue that considering crises as containing the elements of both danger and opportunity is essential for effective crisis communication. They propose a theory to crisis communication called the Discourse of Renewal. The theory provides a good foundation on analyzing the content of crisis messages. The main idea of the theory of Discourse of Renewal is that crisis

communication must aim, from the perspectives of content and style, to have a prospective vision towards the future. The theory emphasizes positive crisis communication with a focus on the future and recovery (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 32). I will use the Discourse of Renewal to illustrate the first factor of effective crisis communication; the content of the message.

According to the Discourse of Renewal, there are three factors related to the content of crisis messages. These are organizational learning, ethical communication and prospective vision of the future. The first element of the Discourse of Renewal is organizational learning. It has been widely accepted in crisis communication research and literature that communicating about learning is an effective response to crisis. A crisis gives the organization a chance to confront its problems and take responsibility for the damage the crisis has inflicted, regardless of whether the crisis has been caused intentionally or unintentionally. What communicating about learning does is that it provides stakeholders with confidence that the organization has resolved the crisis. When an organization communicates about learning from a crisis, the messages should convey what kind of learning has taken place and what actions will be taken in order to prevent the crisis from happening again. Because communication of organizational learning has such a positive impact on an organization's future, it can therefore be argued that effective crisis communication should always include discussion of organizational learning (Ulmer et al. 2011, 213–214).

Another element in giving a renewing crisis response is communicating ethically before, during and after the crisis. It can be proposed that if an organization communicates ethically in everyday situations, it is more likely to communicate ethically in crisis situations as well. However, a crisis can in some cases be the factor that triggers unethical actions (Ulmer et al. 2011, 215). Organizations that have positive values, such as openness, honesty, responsibility, accountability and trustworthiness before the crisis are usually more likely able to create renewal after the crisis has been resolved. Ulmer et al. (2011, 215) propose that in ethical communication, strong stakeholder relationships, an instinctive response to the crisis and communication that meets the ethical standard of significant choice should be involved. The renewal after

going through a crisis is often based on the ethical character of the organization's leader. A leader like this usually responds in an instinctive way that is based on his or her positive, ethical values and virtues. The Discourse of Renewal thus highlights the immediate and instinctive response to crisis, rather than a strategic response that tries to find ways to escape blame (Ulmer et al. 2011, 216).

The third key factor in the Discourse of Renewal is prospective rather than retrospective vision following the crisis. What this means in practice is that the organization is able to communicate with a focus on the future instead of the past. An organization that has the ability to look ahead of the crisis and see future opportunities despite the crisis is more capable of renewal. This kind of organization concentrates on learning from mistakes rather than dwelling on blame or fault. Having a prospective vision also means having an optimistic attitude towards the future. An optimistic and positive attitude towards coping with crises is proved to result in a better recovery from the crisis (Ulmer et al. 2011, 218–219). Even though optimism helps an organization in recovering from a crisis, it must not be forgotten that optimism alone does not secure a good outcome of a crisis. Organizations need to take responsibility of their faulty actions and not be unrealistically optimistic. Having a strong vision for the organization before the crisis occurs helps in maintaining a prospective vision during the crisis as well.

2.2.2 Rhetoric

In my classification based on the questions “what?,” “how?” and “who?” for effective crisis communication, the content gives an answer to the question “what?” The question “how?” is answered by the analysis of the rhetoric of crisis messages. Hoffman & Ford (2010, 186) point out that managing an organizational crisis cannot be effective without the strategic use of messages. It is very important to choose carefully which words to use and in what kind of style to communicate about crises, especially in written communication. It is of great value to the organization when management expresses concern for victims and explains what actions are being taken to prevent the crisis from recurring (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 29).

In written communication it may be more difficult to convey emotion and show empathy, as the main channel in doing that are words, not, for example, facial expressions. In addition to words, meaning and nuances can be added to messages by pictures, different fonts, bold text and italics etc. If the spokesperson of the crisis succeeds in showing emotion through written communication, it can be a great asset in combatting the crisis. As argued above, crisis communication can have a huge impact on the final outcome of the crisis. Therefore, it is not insignificant how written crisis communication is executed.

The persuasiveness of crisis messages can lead to stakeholders believing in the organization and wanting to fight with it despite the crisis. Restoring the faith of the stakeholders also accounts in securing the organization's bright future. Having effective organizational rhetoric can be paralleled with distinguishing oneself as being a model for one's industry. Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow advocate in various of their works (see e.g. 2011, 219) "organizational leaders who hope to inspire others to imitate and embrace their views of crisis as an opportunity to establish themselves as models of optimism and commitment." We can see that an organization's leader, when he or she has effective rhetoric, thus has great power to influence in which direction the organization goes from the turning point, crisis.

2.2.3 Spokesperson

The third factor in effective crisis communication is the selection of the spokesperson and this answers to the question "who?" in my classification. The role of the crisis spokesperson in communicating effectively is crucial. While Coombs (2007) underlines the importance of the role of the crisis spokesperson regarding external communication, the importance of the spokesperson's role in internal crisis communication should not be forgotten or diminished. It is often emphasized that an organization's spokesperson should be well trained, good with the media as well as be an expert on the subject of crisis to minimize the damage the crisis might cause to the organization. This is true, but if the person who is responsible for informing about the crisis internally is not competent, it will be of harm to the organization.

In fact, there is proof that an organization can greatly benefit from a crisis if it selects an empathetic, credible and consistent spokesperson to communicate about crises (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 29). Although anyone inside the organization can be selected as the crisis spokesperson, it is common for the organization's leader to speak up for the organization, especially in large, organization-wide crises. This is a good choice, as the leader is the most powerful person of the organization, which builds credibility. The role of a leader in establishing renewal in crises is motivating stakeholders to stay with the organization through the crisis and make the organization better than it was before the crisis (Ulmer et al. 2011, 219).

3 Social Identity Approach to Crisis Communication

The social identity approach is a social psychological paradigm which refers to two distinct, but interlinked social psychological theories; social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Social identity is an individual's sense and knowledge of being part of a group and it is a key concept in the social identity approach. The social identity approach is one of the most influential theories of group processes and intergroup relations worldwide (Hornsey 2008, 205). This chapter applies the social identity approach to organizational behavior and communication and discusses the social identity in crisis communication. As the approach in question has never been applied to crisis communication before, the following construction on the topic is in its entirety my own.

3.1 Social Identity Approach to Organizational Behavior

The social identity approach engages in a fairly new and fresh approach to organizational behavior. The previous psychological paradigms in the field of organizational behavior, such as the human relations approach, the social cognition approach, the individual differences approach and the economic approach, (see e.g. Haslam 2004, 1–16) have not fully taken into account the significance of social context and the psychological processes that arise from these social contexts. The key idea of the social identity approach is that a group moulds an individual's psychology. Our self-image and identity are linked closely to our group memberships. The group memberships actually function as the source of our social identity (Simon & Trötschel 2008, 104; Helkama, Myllyniemi & Liebkind 2010, 311–312). It can thus be understood that the sense of self is grounded in the groups we belong to.

A strong proof of a group's ability to contribute to an individual's behavior was conducted in minimal group experiments in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament 1971). In one experiment, participants were divided into groups based on meaningless criteria, such as their estimates of dots on a page. After having told the participant in which group they belong to, the participant was then asked to give points to members of their own group (in-group) and the other

group (out-group). The participants were told that they would not benefit of the allocation of points in any way. Considering the groups were formed by trivial criteria, the task of giving points was absurd from the point of view of the participant. Even though one may expect that the point allocation strategy of the participants would be totally random, what was found was something different. Participants had the tendency of giving more points to their own group members than to the members of the other group. Therefore, it could be clearly seen that even though the two groups were only separated by meaningless criteria, participants still favored their own group (Haslam 2004, 18–20).

The minimal group experiment is a strong demonstration of intergroup relations, illustrating a norm of competitive group behavior. The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) explains the reason why competitive group behavior occurs. According to the theory, people have a tendency to desire a positive self-esteem and self-concept, which makes it natural for them to think of their groups as good groups. Due to the fact that groups define how people perceive themselves, people tend to favor their own group in order to make themselves feel better as individuals (Reicher, Spears & Haslam 2010, 48–51). An example of this could be a football fan wearing his favorite football team's shirt after a victorious football match, as it makes the person himself, too, look good. However, the minimal group experiment and subsequent social identity theory do not explain much about intragroup behavior; how people act inside their own group.

Self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987), which stems from the social identity theory, sheds more light on intragroup dynamics. Self-categorization means defining oneself as being part of a group, for example a woman, American or a gym member, and defining oneself according to this social identity. Self-categorization makes people see themselves as representatives of the group rather than individuals. Self-categorizing alone is a sufficient factor in causing group behavior. Individuals act as group members depending on how strongly they are able to think of themselves as being “us,” not just “me.” Turner (1982, 21) sums the function of self-

categorization's product – social identity – by saying that it is “a cognitive mechanism that makes group behavior possible.”

Self-categorization happens in the process where an individual's behavior turns from personal identity action into social identity action. This process is called depersonalization. Depersonalization makes a person see himself and other group members as part of the same group category (Haslam 2004, 30). Depersonalization does not, however, mean that the self disappears, but rather that the self becomes redefined (Haslam, Reicher & Platow 2011, 52–54). What this means in practice is that the self still behaves, thinks and feels. However, from the perspective of self-esteem, the group's status is what counts. Another way to put it is that the status of the group becomes the individual's status as well (Haslam et al. 2011, 52–54). Depersonalization makes a person introduce himself as “an FC Barcelona fan” rather than just “John.”

It is apparent that people are able to categorize themselves and act on different levels, such as a member of an organization as a whole, a member of a department or as an individual. What is important to understand is what makes people categorize themselves in a certain contexts in certain situations. Salience refers to the state when a certain category stands out compared to other categories (Hogg & Terry 2000, 125–126; Haslam 2004, 34–35). An example of this is when two women talk about their favorite music. In such a situation, the salience of the personal identity is significant; “I like jazz, but Charlotte likes heavy metal.” But when two women and five men talk about the equality of salary levels between the two sexes, it is likely for the women's identity to shift from personal to social; “we, women, should earn more.” From the example it can be seen that the salience of an individual's social identity changes depending on context. When contexts change, individuals redefine what they are, who they are and who they are representing.

How does self-categorization affect a working environment, then? Why should self-categorization be considered an important phenomenon in an organizational setting? How can the social identity theory be applied to organizational behavior? Self-categorization as a phenomenon is a significant factor in assessing employees' motivation in a working environment, because motivation is a reflection and product

of self-categorization (Haslam 2004, 67–79). Self-categorization through depersonalization gives reason and motivation to strive for the group's goals and this has a effect on many areas of working life. When the social identity is salient, the employee is more willing and capable of working for the group's best. This is because the group's goals and interests become the individual's genuine interests as well. Thus, the group member endeavors to achieve the things that the group values (Haslam et al. 2011, 54; Wegge & Haslam 2003, 43–59).

Haslam (2004) suggests that all areas of working life are affected and moulded by social identity. In a working environment, the social identity approach has an influence on areas such as leadership, motivation and commitment, communication and information management, group decision making, negotiation and conflict management, productivity and performance as well as stress. According to Haslam (2004, 17) social identity is the key determinant in enabling people reach social cohesion, communicate in an effective manner and have influence over each other. In fact, social identity functions as the source of cohesion (Hogg & Terry 2000, 126–127).

All in all, the message of the social identity approach for organizational behavior and research is that social identity matters. The willingness of individuals to work together as a team is dependant on social identity; the way in which group members define and identify themselves as part of the group. Therefore, all organization functions and activity should be planned in accordance to whatever strengthens and boosts the individuals' social identification within the group. In the following chapter I will discuss the advisable ways of implementing crisis communication from this offset.

3.2 Social Identity in Crisis Communication

Organizational behavior has been researched with a focus on social identity quite a lot for the last ten years (Haslam 2004; Hogg & Terry 2000). Even though communication has been studied as part of organizational behavior, special areas of communication, such as crisis communication, have not been researched from the perspective of social identity. Consequently, the social identity approach has not been applied to crisis communication before, nor is there a ready-made model for crisis communication. Yet,

the social identity theory deepens the understanding of already existing, functioning crisis communication models and concepts and provides them a social psychological explanation. In addition, the theory gives a good foundation for applications of crisis communication.

The social identity analysis on crisis communication explains and defines the reasons why previous models of crisis communication have been found functioning and effective. Moreover, the social identity approach provides completely new insights on crisis communication. The social identity approach explains why previously established factors make crisis communication effective. The social identity theory deepens the understanding of why a crisis can be considered an opportunity, rather than solely something negative. The theory gives psychological insights on the field of crisis communication and provides new aspects on effective communication and crisis management. More than anything, the social identity theory provides a tool for analysis that can be tested.

It was previously established in chapter 2 that a crisis is a turning point for the better or worse in an organization's lifetime. On the grounds of the social identity approach, I suggest that one of the reasons why a crisis is considered a turning point is because it can affect the way organization members perceive themselves as being a part of the community. This, in consequence, affects the whole organization. An organizational crisis therefore threatens the whole organization's social identity. On these grounds it can be proposed that an organizational crisis can have an effect on an individual's social identity and that an organizational crisis is also a potential crisis of shared social identity.

I propose that firstly, an organizational crisis is a potential social identity crisis. Secondly, when a crisis occurs, the guarding and strengthening of the shared social identity should be recognized as being of utmost importance. Crisis communication should be all about safeguarding social identity. When social identity plays a significant role in effective group behavior, as presented in the social identity approach to organizational behavior, a social identity crisis is admittedly an organizational crisis. As a consequence

of a social identity crisis, a group that functioned excellently before would now be incapable of working effectively together. This would certainly turn into an organizational crisis.

According to the social identity theory, our self-image is closely linked to our group memberships and that our group memberships function as a source of our social identity (Reicher et al. 2010, 48–49). As previously argued, people tend to favor their own group over other groups because that way they can acquire a positive self-esteem. While the members of an organization are happy to have a shared social identity inside the organization when it is flourishing, in the case of a crisis a positive identity is threatened. On these grounds it can be proposed that an organizational crisis can have an effect on an individual's social identity and that an organizational crisis is also a potential crisis of shared social identity.

A new perspective on the causal relationship between crisis and social identity is that an organizational crisis has the potential to threaten the shared social identity of the members of the organization. How this happens is when an organization is in crisis, there is a risk of the social identity of the group members to shift from the social identity to personal identity. Technically speaking, the salience of the social identity weakens and the one of personal identity strengthens (Simon & Trötschel 2008, 106–107). This is because it is harder to relate to the organization when it is in crisis and most of all, because the organization's negative situation does not promote the group members' positive self-image.

Let us picture a situation where an industrial company is revealed to have damaged the nature on purpose in order to cut expenses. What may happen in this kind of situation is that the employees' shared social identity gets weaker. This is because the employee does not feel that the organization's actions are in line with the shared, ecological values, which should guide the action of the organization, and which also may guide the employee's life on a personal level. The reason why the social identity loses its importance in this situation is because it does not promote the employees' positive self-concept (Haslam 2004, 22–27). In other words, the employees do not see the company

they work for as something respectable and good, and as a result, they cannot, and do not want to, identify themselves as being part of the working community. As a result of the employees of the company having a weak social identity, it is likely that the employees would then have trouble with teamwork, communicating and committing in the group. The consequences of this would be catastrophic.

But this has not to be the case. A crisis is not necessarily a bad thing. What is important to understand is that when it comes to the final outcome of the crisis – be it bad or good – crisis communication is in a significant role. Crisis communication has a great part in determining the consequences of a crisis. This makes crisis communication even a more important tool of leadership than thought before. What is crucial is how well crisis communication is able to secure the social identity and the way employees are able to identify themselves as part of the working community. On the basis of the social identity approach, the identification of group members can be promoted by a few factors. They are the positive vision of the future, “the rhetoric of we” and the spokesperson as being “one of us.” Each of the three factors will be further explained and justified in the following sub-chapters.

3.2.1 Positive Vision of the Future

It was previously established that effective crisis communication should take into account the content of crisis messages. A significant factor in the Discourse of Renewal introduced by Coombs & Holladay (2012) is a positive vision of the future. According to this aspect, a crisis can be more likely dealt with if the leader of the organization projects a positive vision of the future and has a prospective vision. The social identity approach supports the effectiveness of this strategy by underlining the significance of social categorization. Social categorization does not occur only on the basis of the past or the present, but, to a great extent, of the future. According to Haslam et al. (2011, 69) “categories are as much about saying how things should be as about how they are.” This means that a social identity is as much a promise of the future as well as the present. This argument fits well into the renewing crisis response, as both theories emphasize the importance of having a positive vision of the future. The other two factors of

the discourse of renewal; organizational learning and ethical communication, are closely intertwined with having a prospective vision of the future.

3.2.2 Rhetoric of We

One of the factors in a renewing crisis response is an effective rhetoric. By rhetoric, I mean the style, language use and word choices used in communication. From the perspective of social identity approach, an effective rhetoric would mean addressing group members collectively. Addressing group members collectively means using terms such as “us,” “we” and “our” in crisis communication rather than “me,” “you” or “she.” In this work, I will use a concept that I call “the rhetoric of we” when speaking of addressing group members collectively. It makes a great impact if a leader addresses employees collectively rather than individually. According to Postmes (2003, 89) “it has powerful implications on how people make decisions, evaluate their group and develop a sense of cohesion and unity.” From this a conclusion can be drawn that an effective rhetoric, i.e. the rhetoric of we, in crisis communication builds the group members’ positive social identity and thus makes it easier for the whole organization to combat a crisis.

3.2.3 Spokesperson as “One of Us”

As already discussed, crisis communication literature emphasizes the importance of the selection of an empathetic, credible and consistent spokesperson (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 29). The social identity theory supports and further explains the reason for this by arguing that the spokesperson should be selected on the basis of how well other group members are able to perceive the spokesperson as being “one of us” (Haslam et al. 2011, 78–108). The credibility and trustworthiness of the spokesperson flow from how the employees of an organization sense the spokesperson as representing the group as a whole. A spokesperson who is seen as “one of us” rather than “one of them” can more easily have influence on the group members (Haslam et al. 2011, 77). In fact, leadership is typically defined as having influence on others (Northouse 2010, 3; Huczynski & Buchanan 2007, 695).

According to the social identity theory, the role of the organization leader in molding the organization members' social identity is essential. At the same time as crisis communication is many times seen as part of crisis management rather than its own function, social categorization occurs as a result of powerful leadership. The crisis spokesperson and the consistency and persuasiveness of crisis messages are all interlinked factors in effective crisis communication, culminating in the role of the crisis spokesperson. The crisis spokesperson is, in many cases, the leader of the organization.

Haslam et al. (2011, 1–2) argue that effective leadership is based on the leader's ability to project a psychology that they share with others. In other words, the leader should embody the concept of “we-ness” rather than “I-ness.” Further, the only way for the leader to spark enthusiastic action in the followers is when the followers see the leader as somebody whose psychology is aligned with theirs. To simplify, in order for the crisis spokesperson's messages to be persuasive the group members must be able to perceive the spokesperson as being “one of us” in contrast to “one of them.” The technical term for this is prototypicality, which refers to a person, in this case the crisis spokesperson, as being considered representing the shared social identity (Haslam 2004, 49). What prototypicality means in practice is that the spokesperson is perceived as being “one of us.”

4 In Search of Social Identity in Crisis Communication: U.S. Embassy Helsinki

In the previous chapter I created a theory for crisis communication that supports social identity on the basis of previous crisis communication and social identity theories. The elements that can be considered as possible social identity boosters are the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we and the crisis spokesperson as being “one of us.” Each of the elements was discussed in chapter 3.2.

The objective of this thesis is to find out how social identity is pursued to be created and strengthened through crisis emails at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki. The objective is to see how Embassy employees perceive the crisis emails and especially the elements that possibly strengthen social identity, as well as to find out whether the emails have a connection with how employees perceive themselves as part of the Embassy community. The following three research questions were set for this work in the first chapter of the thesis:

1. How is the sense of “we-ness” and belonging to the common group (i.e. social identity) conveyed through U.S. government internal, crisis-related emails?
2. How do the employees feel about the email crisis communication and themselves as belonging into the U.S. State Department community?
3. Is there a connection between how the employees feel about the crisis communication and how they sense their belongingness?

To find answers to the research questions, two different research strategies are used. The first strategy is a text analysis and the second strategy is a survey. In this chapter, I will execute the text analysis, looking into U.S. Embassy crisis emails. This chapter thus answers to the first research question. In this chapter I will discuss email as part of U.S. Embassy crisis communication and analyze the crisis emails received by U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees from the viewpoints of the positive vision of the future, the rheto-

ric of we and the spokesperson as “one of us.” In the text analysis, I will attempt finding elements in the emails that possibly strengthen the social identity of the Embassy staff. I will do this by applying the social identity approach to crisis communication discussed in chapter 3.

4.1 Email as Part of Crisis Communication in the U.S. Embassy

The United States have many diplomatic missions around the world, including Embassies. The U.S. Embassy in Helsinki is one of the missions and the only one located in Finland. The Embassy in Helsinki is connected to the U.S. Department of State, as well as other U.S. embassies around the world in many ways. One of the tools in keeping in touch is email. U.S. Embassies around the world are updated on events and occurrences regularly by the State Department by sending informative emails. When crises occur, email is a key tool in informing U.S. Embassy staff members in different countries and locations. Even though some crises, such as natural catastrophes, directly affect only the people in the catastrophe area, all U.S. Embassies world-wide are kept updated on the events. As Finland is considered a low-risk country for any kind of crises, a great extent of the crisis emails sent to Embassy staff in Finland do not require special action. For the embassy in Finland, crisis emails can be considered more as informative rather than requiring action, only giving a heads-up that something has happened.

The crisis emails are usually sent by management level persons. It is not uncommon for the Secretary of State to personally write a message to all State Department employees. If a crisis affects especially a certain department of U.S. Embassies, it is regularly that the head of the department in question sends the email. For example, the Acting Secretary for Commerce in many cases informs the Commerce employees. In large crises, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks the emails are usually sent to all State Department employees around the world. The objective of informing all employees world-wide is to keep the whole of the State Department updated on crisis events and occurrences that affect the USA in some way. The United States, including the State Department and all diplomatic missions is threatened by international terrorism (U.S. Department of State 2008, 2.) Due to that fact, minor and major crises occur fair-

ly often, which is why crisis emails are also being sent regularly. Generally, of all the crises that occur every employee receives at least one email message.

4.2 Research Frame

I chose a text analysis as a research strategy for my thesis as my research data consists of emails. I also wanted to look deeply into the rhetoric and style of the emails, which supports the selection of a text analysis. Because the text analysis is purely my own interpretation of the email crisis communication, I also decided to do a survey to find out whether the crisis emails affect the U.S. Embassy staff in a way that, in theory, they should. The survey also increases the research validity, as two different research strategies were used. I will discuss the planning and execution of the survey in chapter 5.

In the following text analysis I will examine the crisis emails sent to U.S. Embassy Helsinki staff. The purpose of the text analysis is to find out whether the emails include elements that, in theory, should support the staff members' social identity. The emails that I will analyze have been collected during my internship at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki in the autumn of 2012. From these emails I selected the ones that were most rich in rhetoric and which I think present the wealth of crisis emails in the Embassy well regarding the style of writing about crises. In selecting the emails, I also kept in mind the three elements that possibly support social identity discussed in chapter 3.2. (the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we and the spokesperson as being "one of us") and aimed at picking the emails to use on those grounds.

Even though the material I use is collected during the timeframe of August 2012 until January 2013, the Embassy staff receives similar emails on a regular basis, which makes the material I use relevant still today. During my internship I collected 23 crisis-related emails. Because of security reasons I cannot include excerpts from all of the collected emails in my thesis. Only excerpts of emails that are considered public information are used in the text analysis. Of the 23 emails I had collected, I will use excerpts of six of them in the text analysis. The rest I discarded because of security reasons or because they did not include as much relevant content and rhetoric.

In analyzing the emails I will use three criteria; the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we and the spokesperson as being “one of us.” Each of these elements was discussed previously in chapter 3.2. My objective is to see whether the emails have elements in them that could possibly affect the employees’ social identity. In analyzing the emails, I will try to find word choices that support the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we as well as the spokesperson as being “one of us.”

The criteria for portraying a positive vision of the future I use the extent in which the future is discussed in an optimistic style. This should include organizational learning; communicating about what has been learned from the crisis and what will be done in the future, not just to avoid similar crises, but to make the organization’s current situation even better (Ulmer et al. 2011, 213–214). Regarding the positive vision of the future, I will also look for word choices and the style of language that emphasize the future rather than the past, such as positive adjectives, especially in comparative form, the use of the word “future” as well as the use of the future tense.

From the viewpoint of the rhetoric of we, as the criterion in evaluating the emails I will consider addressing the email receivers collectively (Postmes 2003, 89). As addressing message receivers collectively I consider expressions that include the words “we,” “us” and “our.” Any other expressions that can be considered addressing people collectively, such as the use of the word “family,” I will also use as a criterion.

As for the role of the crisis spokesperson, I will analyze how well the crisis emails portray the management level persons as being “one of us” (Haslam et al. 2011, 78–108). As the criteria for considering the emails as promoting the “one of us” ideology I use the word choices that have a collective feeling to them, such as the word “family.” As a criterion I will also consider the communication of openly expressing personal feelings, both positive and negative. In addition, I consider the communicating of paralleling of the management’s and the average employees’ work as being equally valuable, a criterion (Haslam et al. 2011, 1–2). The criteria are displayed in Table 1.

Criteria for text analysis		
Positive vision of the future	Rhetoric of we	Spokesperson as “one of us”
Future discussed in optimistic style, organizational learning, emphasis on future rather than past, positive adjectives and future tense	Addressing people collectively, use of the words “we,” “us” and “our” and “family”	Addressing people collectively, expression of feelings, paralleling an Embassy employee’s work with theirs

Table 1. The criteria used in analyzing the U.S. Embassy crisis emails.

4.3 Positive Vision of the Future

According to the Discourse of Renewal which was discussed in chapter 2, the main focus of crisis communication should be on the future and recovery. According to the theory, having a positive vision of the future is important in succeeding in crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 32; Ulmer et al. 2011, 218–219). The social identity approach supports this strategy by proposing that having a prospective and positive vision of the future strengthens and promotes social identity. According to the approach, social identity is as much a vision of how things should be as a representation of the present or of the past (Haslam et al. 2011, 69).

The crisis emails sent to U.S. Embassy Helsinki staff have a clear overall feeling of positivity and optimism. A typical pattern of the emails is to first discuss what has happened. The second part is to communicate what has already been done in order to solve the conflict and thirdly, what will be done in the future to avoid similar crises. Even if the event of crisis is tragic, such as the attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya in the autumn of 2012 when four staff members, including the Ambassador, died, the emails still portray an optimistic attitude on the future. As an example, in her message to all U.S. State Department employees world-wide, Secretary Hillary Clinton starts by writing “Reflecting on the tragic events of last week, I want to say how proud I am to

serve with you.” A large amount of the emails emphasize the importance of the future rather than the present. The present, and the possible bad situation, is acknowledged but the main focus is not dwelling on the misfortune but rather on the opportunities and future vision.

As already established before in chapter 3.2.1., organizational learning is closely entwined with having a prospective, positive vision of the future. Thus, communicating organizational learning should, for its part, also contribute to boosting the employees’ social identity. Organizational learning is communicated consistently in the emails regarding crises. An example of communicating learning can be found in an email sent by the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the attack in Benghazi:

Even on the most difficult and tragic of days, I am reminded of all you have done to build new partnerships, to create opportunities and to resolve conflicts worldwide. Our country is safer and stronger for it.

Another example is a message by President Obama on the same day, on the same subject:

And I hope that if you can take away one single thing from this tragedy, that we’re going to redouble our efforts and strengthen our resolve... Take heart that no matter how difficult this particular day is, what you guys are doing every single day is making the world better.

The crisis emails sent to the U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees seem to be consistent in both content and style. The consistency of the messages can most clearly be seen in the style of communication. The style of the messages is professional, i.e. it includes all the necessary factual content. However, in addition to the facts the messages include a lot of content that expresses emotions. The messages sent by Secretary Clinton and President Obama regarding crises are typically very personal. It is always a mixture of informing and conveying personal emotion. Consistency can also be seen in the way uncertainty is communicated. An example is a background briefing by Senior Administration Officials to update staff on the Libya attack communicating that there is a lot of gaps in knowledge of the turn of the events in the crisis area. It is made clear various

times that many issues are uncertain and that once new information comes about, people will be updated. As discussed previously, communicating uncertainty is also a key element in effective crisis communication.

Yet another element that can be seen in the crisis emails is ethical communication, which is part of the Discourse of Renewal, as discussed before. Ethical communication can be well seen in the emails where the State Secretary and the President discuss their personal feelings about current crises and their causes. It can be clearly seen from the messages that the Secretary and the President have responded to the crises in an instinctive way, which is based on their positive values and virtues. As already argued before, this has been proved to be a good way to create renewal and strengthen the group members' social identity (Ulmer et al. 2011, 216; Haslam et al. 2011, 1–2). A great example of a message that directly indicates the leadership that is based on ethical values can be seen from the following citations by the President on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya.

Because one thing that I'm absolutely confident about is that when we lead with our values, we lead with our ideas, and we don't shy away from the world, and we're not consumed by cynicism, but the belief that we can make things a little bit better. But when we embrace that, then we're securing a better future for our kids and our grand-kids and all those Americans to come.

So I hope that alongside your sorrow today, all of you also take a moment to reflect on how important your work is and to remind yourselves that it's not that often in life where you're allowed to really make a difference, where you're put in a position where what you do matters, that changes lives.

In the first excerpt, President Obama directly states that leadership is executed with values. The citation also displays well the positive vision of the future by expressing the belief of making things better and mentioning about securing a better future. In the second excerpt the President emphasizes the importance of work as a value and encourages colleagues to appreciate the work they do, which can be seen as an attempt to strengthen the employees' social identity.

4.4 Rhetoric of We

Having an effective rhetoric in communicating about crises is a key element in a renewing crisis response. As already discussed in this chapter, the U.S. Embassy crisis emails typically have a personal feel to them, and they generally portray a positive attitude towards the future, as well as a genuinely warm feeling. From the viewpoint of the social identity approach, the single most important factor contributing in strengthening the shared social identity is probably addressing people collectively. As stated previously, I have decided to call the concept of addressing people collectively the rhetoric of we. In addition, using words such as “family” to promote a collective feeling can be considered a significant factor in strengthening the social identity. Following, I will discuss the way people are addressed in the crisis emails. I will look at whether there can be found any word choices in the emails that can be perceived as addressing people collectively, and whether this could have a possibility of strengthening the social identity of the U.S. Embassy employees.

As discussed previously in chapter 3, the social identity approach suggests that addressing people collectively has a huge impact on the way individuals perceive themselves as belonging into different groups. For addressing people collectively I use the term rhetoric of we, which means addressing people in a way that makes them feel they are part of “we.” In simplicity, the rhetoric of we in practice would mean saying “we are working towards a better world” rather than “I am working” or “you are working.”

The rhetoric of we is present in the internal crisis emails of U.S. Embassy in Helsinki in a clear way. The emails are rich in pronouns, such as “we,” “us” and “our,” which promote the sense of “we-ness” among employees. The passive voice is not used much in the emails and the sentences are usually in active form, which gives a personal feel to the messages. An example of using the rhetoric of we can be found in a safety and security update sent by U.S. International Trade Administration (ITA): “The unrest in parts of the world is very unsettling and can make it difficult, at least temporarily, to carry out our mission of promoting and advancing commercial relationships abroad.” The following extract is from the farewell letter of the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, which illustrates not only the rhetoric of we, but also organizational learning.

We need to learn from the tragedy in Benghazi, and make every possible improvement -- and we will. We also need to recognize the extraordinary service of our security professionals. They are courageous patriots and consummate professionals. And like you, I trust them with my life.

The rhetoric of we is on display in the following citation, an email sent to all Commerce employees by the Chief of Staff: “The damage and devastation brought by Hurricane Sandy and the after effects of the storm have been heartbreaking to watch and our thoughts and prayers are with those who were affected.” Another example of boosting we-ness in crisis communication is an email sent by Acting Secretary Rebecca Blank to the Commerce team: “In working with all of you over the past few years, it has become clear to me that the spirit of public service in each Commerce employee is part of what makes our Department such a great place to work.” The final example of using the rhetoric of we and boosting a shared social identity is an extract from an email of President Obama’s thoughts on the attack in Libya. It is clear in the following extract that the President aims in creating a feel of we-ness, belongingness into the big, American community.

And what I know has always been one of America’s greatest gifts to the world, one of our greatest traits as a people, is the fact that we’re not made up of a single tribe, a single religion or a single race, but we’re this collection of strivers and dreamers, people from all around the world who came here because we all agreed on a creed, on a set of principles – the idea that all men and women are created equal, that we’re all endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights – that these aren’t just American rights, they’re not just Western rights; they are aspirations that people in the smallest village in Libya or in the most prosperous cities in Europe all believe in and care about, and that part of our task is to make sure that the way we project power as the greatest nation on Earth is consistent with those values.

Another distinguishable feature in the crisis emails is the use of the word “family.” This can be considered a variation of the rhetoric of we, as the word “family” addresses people collectively in a similar way the rhetoric of we does. The family rhetoric can be seen in the following citation, in which President Obama discusses the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya.

So this is a setback today, and part of our family has been lost. But don't lose that sense of hopefulness. Don't lose that sense that somehow the world is not subject to our better selves. If we work hard enough and smart enough, then over time we move the world in a better direction.

Another example showcasing the use of the word “family” in creating a collective atmosphere is the State Secretary Hillary Clinton’s following message, in which she discusses the terrorist attack to the Embassy in Benghazi:

After nearly four years of working closely with you, and visiting embassies, consulates and domestic facilities, I am honored to be a member of this incredible family. I thank you for your service, from the bottom of my heart.

4.5 Spokesperson: “One of Us”

As discussed previously in chapter 3, the crisis spokesperson has great importance regarding the end result of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay 2012, 29; Haslam et al. 2011, 78–108; Haslam et al. 2011, 77). It was previously established that in order for crisis communication to be effective and in order to make the employees’ social identity’s salience strengthen, the employees must perceive the spokesperson as being “one of us” (Haslam et al. 2011, 1–2).

It was discussed before that in case of particularly serious crises, the top management of the organization usually comments on the crisis in some way (Ulmer et al. 2011, 219). In some cases, it may difficult for the average employee of the organization to perceive the members of the top management as being “one of us” because they are on such a higher level in the organization hierarchy. From the viewpoint of the social identity approach, it is hence important for the employees to be able to perceive the top management as being “one of us.” When the employees are able to perceive the top management as being “one of us,” it is more likely that the message will be received well and that the employees will agree with the message (Northouse 2010, 3; Huczynski & Buchanan 2007, 695). Considering effective crisis communication, it is thus significant to what extent employees are able to see the top management as “one

of us.” In technical terms, the prototypicality of the top management is what makes crisis communication effective.

The U.S. Embassy crisis emails are usually sent by the top management. In case of serious crises, it is not uncommon for the State Secretary or the President to write a personal message for all employees. In their messages to colleagues regarding the occurrences in Benghazi, Secretary Clinton and President Obama both accentuate all staff as being one big family. Secretary Clinton writes: “I am honored to be a member of this incredible family. I thank you for your service, from the bottom of my heart.” President Obama refers to the loss of lives in the attack in Libya and states: “So this is a setback today, and part of our family has been lost.” It is clear that the Secretary as well as the President want to project a sense of belongingness to the U.S. State Department community, trying to engage people into thinking they are full, precious members of the family.

In the crisis emails concerning the Benghazi attack, Secretary Clinton and President Obama address the embassy staff in a personal, genuine feeling way. The messages do not remain distant, as sometimes happens when top management addresses their staff in the other end of the hierarchy. Conversely, the emails are very intimate, conveying an impression that the Secretary and the President are on the same level as everyone else in the State Department hierarchy. The impression of such closeness can be accounted for the Secretary and the President both expressing their feelings openly. President Obama opens his letter to the Embassy staff by writing: “Obviously, the first thing that I want to say, and what we all feel, is deep sorrow over the loss of Chris and Sean.” Another example of this can be seen in the following farewell message by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

I wanted to reach out to you directly after this challenging week, and express my gratitude for everything you do to advance our nation's interests and values. That is how we keep faith with those we serve and honor those we've lost. Even after four years, I continue to be amazed by your dedication, energy, and talent. It is a privilege to be part of your team.

On the basis of the email excerpts, I think it is not unfounded to say that if the top management desires to project an impression of themselves as being “one of us,” the way of emphasizing the concept of a working community family as well as openly expressing feelings can be considered a successful way of doing this. However, this does not secure that the employees perceive the top management as being “one of us.” All of the factors will be put into practice and tested through a survey, which will be discussed in chapter 5.

5 Planning and Execution of the Survey

After having created a theory for analyzing crisis communication through the social identity approach, I have analyzed U.S. Embassy email crisis communication with the conclusion that crisis communication is executed in a way the social identity approach suggests. The U.S. Embassy crisis communication by email is a clear demonstration of an attempt to make the social identity salient for the category of an Embassy employee. This is done by projecting a positive vision of the future, using the rhetoric of we and portraying the crisis spokesperson as “one of us.” Now we can proceed to research how the Embassy employees perceive the crisis communication, and whether it has an effect on their social identity in a way that, in theory, it should.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how the U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees find the type of email crisis communication, which aims at strengthening the social identity in the category of the employees’ workplace. In addition, the goal of the survey is to find out whether there is a connection between how the employees feel about the crisis emails and how strongly they sense their belongingness to the Embassy community. The following three research questions were set for this work in the first chapter of the thesis:

1. How is the sense of “we-ness” and belonging to the common group (i.e. social identity) conveyed through U.S. government internal, crisis-related emails?
2. How do the employees feel about the email crisis communication and themselves as belonging into the U.S. State Department community?
3. Is there a connection between how the employees feel about the crisis communication and how they sense their belongingness?

The first research question was answered in chapter 4. The purpose of the following survey is to answer questions 2 and 3. This chapter discusses the planning and the execution of the survey. In this chapter, I will discuss the survey as a research method for

this thesis. I will also discuss the objectives behind each section and question in the survey and clarify what the statements and questions aim to investigate. Finally, I will discuss the technical aspect in sending the survey.

5.1 Compilation of the Survey

To find out whether the U.S. Embassy crisis emails include elements that can be considered as supportive regarding social identity, a text analysis was used as a research strategy (see chapter 4). In order to research the Embassy employees' thoughts on these emails, I selected a survey. I chose the survey to research the subject because I wanted to see how the Embassy staff perceives the crisis emails. I considered a survey a good way of researching the subject, as I could include excerpts of the crisis emails in the survey so that the respondents could understand what I mean by crisis communication. The excerpts were needed also to find out employees' thoughts on certain words and expressions. I thought a survey was also a good choice because it gives the respondent a possibility of answering in a timeframe that is convenient for them. As the survey was quite long and consisted of many questions, I also wanted to give the participants a chance to take time to read the questions and the excerpts to make sure they understand the subject of research.

I chose a survey as a research strategy because I wanted the respondents to read the email excerpts carefully in tranquility. An interview could have been another possible research strategy for this thesis, but I discarded it because I wanted to give the respondents a peaceful time to respond to the survey, which many times an interview situation does not provide. The subject and the questions can also be of sensitive nature to some respondents, which is why I considered a survey a better choice, as in that way an individual respondent could not be recognized from the results. The positive side of an interview would have been the fact that in case of confusion or ambiguity about the questions, I would have been there to advise the respondents in answering the questions. In the case of the survey, the respondents had to get by on their own. To avoid ambiguities, I tried to explain the survey and the subject as clearly as I could in the cover letter as well as in the introduction to the survey.

The survey was used as a tool for collecting data. The questionnaire for the survey was conducted on the basis of this thesis' theoretical framework as well as previous research concerning social identity in an organizational setting (see e.g. Haslam 2004; Haslam et al. 2011; Hogg And Terry 2000). The results of applying the social identity approach to crisis communication, discussed in chapter 3 were used to compile the survey.

In the survey I researched how the employees find the style of crisis communication executed at the Embassy and how the employees assess the effect of the crisis emails on their own feeling of being part of the working community. I researched the subject from three different perspectives; the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we and the crisis spokesperson as being "one of us." As discussed in chapter 4, the goal of all these elements is to strengthen the social identity of the message receivers.

The questionnaire is divided into six sections; 1) Background information, 2) Crisis communication, 3) My work at the Embassy, 4) Myself as part of the Embassy community, 5) Organization and 6) Myself as an Embassy employee. I selected the sections on the basis of the theory I had created in chapter 3. In the first section, background information was collected from the respondents for later analysis. The purpose of the second section was to introduce the respondent's to the subject, as well as to research their opinions on crisis communication on a more general level. Sections 3, 4 and 5 aimed at researching the employees' thoughts on the three different elements used in the crisis emails in order to strengthen social identity, and to see into their opinions on whether the elements increase their appreciation or motivation towards their work (i.e. social identity.) Section 3 corresponds to the positive vision of the future, section 4 to the rhetoric of we and section 5 to the spokesperson as being "one of us." The purpose of the final section is to come to an understanding of the respondents' social identity.

In order to make the taking the survey as easy as possible, I marked each section with a separate title. In each of the sections I also included one or two excerpts of the crisis

emails I had already discussed in the text analysis. The purpose of these excerpts was to refresh the memory of the people taking the survey and also to clarify what kind of emails I mean when I talk about crisis communication. As I also researched the way that certain expressions of language or word choices affect the employees, it was necessary to have the email citations shown in the survey. The questionnaire can be found from Attachment 2.

The questionnaire consisted mostly of structured statements, which were to be answered on a scale of one to five. In the statements, participants were to choose an alternative that best describes their opinion on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 disagree and 5 strongly disagree. I selected a scale as a means of answering as I thought it would be easy for the respondents to understand. In addition, because the survey consisted of mostly statements rather than questions, I found that answering to that type of statements would be the most natural using a scale. I settled on a scale of 1 to 5 because I think it gives the respondents a good and clear set of options from which to choose. I could have made the scale ranging from 1 to 3, 1 being agree, 2 neither agree nor disagree and 3 disagree. However, this kind of scale would have given me black-and-white results, which is not optimal should the subject of research be taken into account. Because I wanted to find out about the employees' feelings, it made sense to give the respondents the option of agreeing or disagreeing strongly and mildly with the statement.

The questionnaire also had some open questions. As the survey was quite long, I wanted for the majority of the questions to be structured, as it makes answering quicker and easier for the participants. However, I also wanted to give the participants the chance to express their thoughts in a more personal way through open questions. I hoped to get several answers to the open questions, as they provide a more deep understanding on the subject as well as on the survey takers' thoughts. In the open questions, the participants are not limited by the structured statements but can rather express their opinions in their own words. All the structured statements to be answered on a scale of one to five were compulsory to the participants, whilst the open questions were voluntary. I

did not want to make the open questions compulsory in case someone would not understand the question or would simply not have anything to say on the subject.

In the background information section there were only two parts to be filled in; citizenship and the number of years of service at the U.S. Embassy Helsinki. I chose to ask these two pieces of background information, as I could compare the results later on to see if these variables have any effect on the results and whether I could make any generalizations based on the results. I also thought it would be interesting to see whether there could be seen a clear difference in the answers based on the nationality of the respondent. Additionally, I assumed the length of the respondents' employment could theoretically have an effect on the answers, which is why I added the question to the survey. Other interesting pieces of background information could have been the gender, age or title of the respondents, but I decided to leave these factors out because they would have broadened the research too much.

To find out the number of years of service at the Embassy, a multiple choice question was used. The different choices were 0–2, 3–6, 7–11 and 12 or over. I selected these scales on the basis that I knew that there are people in the Embassy that have worked for very different length time periods in the Embassy. There are posts that rotate, which means that employments can be fairly short. However, some of the posts can last longer, which is why there are also many people in the Embassy who have worked under the same title for many years. The first three scales, 0–2, 3–6 and 7–11 I chose because I believed there would be variety as such in the respondents' length of employment. As the last option of the question I selected 12 or over because I think 12 years is a fairly long time to be in the same employment, and by 12 years, employees can be assumed to have become well established in the workplace.

The citizenship part was an open question. This is partly because I wanted to give the opportunity for the possible dual nationality owners to insert both nationalities, and partly because otherwise I would have had to insert all possible nationalities for a multiple choice question. Even though a multiple choice question makes responding to the survey easier for the respondents, I thought that nationality is an easy question for the

respondent even if it is an open question. In addition, it was the only compulsory open question in the survey, which is why I believe it did not make the responding to the survey more difficult in a significant way.

The first section after the background information, “Crisis communication,” was to introduce the participants to the subject and to find out their thoughts on crisis communication via email, in general. The section included three structured statements and one open question. In the first structured statement, “I can recall reading emails regarding different crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks, storms, strikes etc. during my employment in the Embassy,” the participant was asked to give his or her opinion on whether he or she recalls reading emails regarding crisis situations. The purpose of this statement was to make sure that the participants understand what is meant by crisis communication. The purpose was also to ensure that the respondents have actually read the emails, and that they have registered the messages.

The purpose of the second statement, “It is important for me to be informed about crises, even if they would not directly affect my work at the Embassy in Helsinki (e.g. a storm in Florida or a terrorist attack in New York),” was to see if participants valued the flood of possibly irrelevant crisis emails. The goal of the third statement, “I feel that email is a suitable channel for communicating about crises,” was to find out whether employees think email is a suitable channel for informing about crises. I thought it would be important to know whether the employees consider email as an appropriate tool for crisis communication, or would they rather receive the information through a different channel. The last question of the section was an open one: “To you, what is the significance of informing about crises by email?” The purpose of the question was to research the significance of crisis emails to the employees. I included this question to the survey to give the participants a chance to express their thoughts in their own words, thus enabling them to add something I had possibly forgotten to ask.

The purpose of the second section, “My work at the Embassy,” was to find out whether the positive vision portrayed in the crisis emails has any effect on the employ-

ees' motivation towards their work. As discussed previously in chapter 3, the social identity approach suggests that communicating a positive vision of the future is a significant tool for making social identity salient. This is important because a salient social identity is often a good indicator of a high level of motivation. In the beginning of this section, there was a citation of an email in which President Obama discusses the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya and talks about "we" doubling "our" efforts and strengthening "our" resolve. He emphasizes that what the State Department employees do every day is making the world better. The first statement of the section, "Reading messages similar to the one above encourages me to do my best for the success of the U.S. Embassy Helsinki," aims to find out whether such messages have a positive effect on employees' motivation in doing their work.

The purpose of the second statement, "The President's vision of a better world strengthens the respect I have for the work we do at the Embassy," was to see whether the President's positivity increases the respect employees have for their work. The respect for the workplace community makes the identification to the community easier, and thus signals the salience of social identity (see Haslam et al. 2011, 115–116). The last structured statement of the section, "The email above have a positive effect on my motivation in achieving the Embassy's missions," aims to directly find out whether the emails have positive influence on the staff's motivation. The final part of the section which is an open question, "Does the positive vision projected in the crisis-related emails inspire you to work harder? If yes, how?" pursues to investigate whether the emails make employees work harder in order to reach the Embassy's goals. It would be interesting to see whether any of the respondents should report that crisis communication by email makes them want to work harder. Should the employees report that they are willing to work harder because of crisis communication, it would demonstrate that crisis communication indeed has an effect on employees' motivation based on group membership (i.e. social identity).

The third section, "Myself as part of the Embassy Community," aimed at finding out how persuasive the rhetoric of we is. The people taking the survey were introduced to the section by two email excerpts which consisted of various examples showcasing the

rhetoric of we as well as the use of the word “family.” The purpose of the third section was to see whether employees perceive themselves as part of “we” and “family,” which are being constructed in the crisis emails.

The first statement of this section, “I feel like all U.S. embassies around the world are part of a big family,” pursued to find out employees’ thoughts on all U.S. Embassies as being one family. The purpose was to find out whether employees are able to identify with such a broad category as all the U.S. Embassies world-wide, or even the whole of the State Department. The goal of the second statement, “The texts above strengthen my sense of belongingness to the family of embassies,” was to see whether the rhetoric of we and the use of the word “family” present in the crisis emails have an effect on how the employees feel about being part of a family.

The third statement, “In the above text the President talks about 'our family' and about how 'we work hard.' I can easily relate to such expressions” pursued to examine the way that certain expressions, such as “our family” and “we work hard” affect the employees’ feeling of being part of the family. The open question of the section, “What does the Embassy family mean to you?” inquired directly what the Embassy family means to the respondent. The purpose of this question was to find out whether the employees perceive themselves as part of a bigger whole and whether the crisis emails have an effect on this conception.

The objective of the fourth section, titled “Organization” was to see whether the employees can relate to the crisis spokesperson, the top management. The objective of this section was to see whether the employees see the top management as being “one of us.” A spokesperson who is perceived as being “one of us” (in-group member) is more easily influential than someone who is perceived as representing “one of them” (out-group member) (Haslam et al. 2011, 77). The first statement, “I feel that the top management is interested in me as an Embassy employee,” was quite general, aiming to find out if the employees feel that the top management is interested in them as Embassy employees. The statement aimed at discovering whether Embassy employees feel connected to the top management.

The prototypicality (being “one of us”) of the spokesperson can be measured by to what extent the employees perceive the spokesperson’s goals and values as their own. With the second statement, “I feel that together with the top management, I am working towards the same goals,” I pursued to find out if the staff feels they are working towards the same goals as the top management. The explanation for the selection of this statement is that one definition for a group is that it has a common set of goals (Haslam et al. 2011, 60–63). Individuals having common goals suggests that they are part of the same group with same intentions. The purpose of the third statement, “I believe I share the same values as the top management,” was to investigate whether the employees think that they share the same values as the top management. The reason for adding this statement to the survey is the fact that, in addition to having a common set of goals, having a common set of values is also a factor that connects group members (Haslam et al. 2011, 50, 53–55). In the last, open question, “How would you describe the leadership of the top management in crisis situations?” I advised the respondents to share their thoughts on the top management’s leadership skills in crisis situations.

The purpose of the fifth and at the same time the last section was to research the employees’ social identity. The aim of the whole section was to find out whether the employees consider the workplace category an important one not only inside the workplace, but especially, outside the workplace. If the employee defines him or herself by the Embassy category, it indicates that the person’s self-concept is constructed partly by the Embassy. The results of this section can then be compared to the results of the respondents’ thoughts on crisis emails and, consequently, see if the results correspond.

The first statement of the section, “I am proud to be able to say that I work at a U.S. Embassy,” aims at finding out how proud the employees are of working at the Embassy. A person who is proud of their workplace more likely identifies with the workplace community, i.e. the social identity of the workplace category is salient. The second statement, “Amongst my acquaintances, it is well-known that I work at a U.S. Embassy,” investigates the same thing, but in a more disguised way. The purpose of the statement is to find out how happy the survey respondents are to talk about their

workplace. A person who is willing to talk about their workplace is likely to consider the workplace important to them, which, in turn, indicates the workplace is an essential part of the employee's self-concept.

The objective of the third statement, "When I meet new people, I am happy to mention my workplace," is to find out whether respondents are willing to talk about their workplace to new acquaintances. The fourth statement, "From all of the groups I belong to, the Embassy is one of the most important ones," aims at finding out how important the Embassy is compared to all the other groups the respondent belongs to. The fifth statement, "The Embassy is more than just a workplace to me" advises the respondents to take a stand on whether the Embassy is more than a workplace to them. Should the employees consider the Embassy more than just a workplace, it indicates that the workplace is important to the employees also outside work. The open question, "How do you feel about being a member of the Embassy community?," the last part of the section inquires directly how the respondent feels about being a member of the Embassy community. Each of the statements and the open question of this section pursue to find out, by researching how important the Embassy community is for the respondents, how strong the employees' Embassy related social identity is.

5.2 Transmission of the Survey

The survey was executed by Webropol and published on the internet. The survey was open from 16 October until 24 October 2013. The respondents thus had a week time to take the survey. The survey was sent to 12 U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees, who I thought represented the Embassy staff well regarding their nationality, position, department and length of employment. I chose an internet survey because of its easy accessibility and convenience for the people taking the survey. I could have executed the survey using paper questionnaires, posting them or taking them to the participants personally, but that would have taken more time. The results of an internet survey can also be more easily analyzed and compared, if necessary. The survey was accessible through a link, which I sent to the participants by email.

During my internship at the Embassy I had already collected contact information for Embassy employees in case I needed it in my research. From these contacts I selected 12 people to whom I decided to send the survey to. I selected the 12 people because I thought they presented well the staff diversity at the Embassy regarding title, department, length of employment, age and gender. Because of the strict security protocol of the Embassy, I wanted to send the survey only to people I had met during my internship in order to avoid confusion. After all, it is not common that former interns execute such surveys, especially on a subject of this nature.

I asked a former colleague of mine to forward the cover letter I had written along with the link to the survey on my behalf. I did this because, as the security is controlled well at the Embassy, employees are encouraged to not open any emails that seem even slightly suspicious or that are sent by someone they do not know. As almost a year had gone by since I worked at the Embassy, I wanted my colleague to forward the message just in case someone would not remember me and thus not venture to open the email or the link to the survey. In addition, there have been cases when mail has been sent to the Embassy email addresses and they have gone directly into garbage mail. This is the other reason why I decided to ask my colleague to send the email on my behalf, to make sure that the people I wanted to reach really receive my message.

Along with the link to the survey I sent a cover letter, introducing myself and informing of why I am contacting them. I wanted to write the cover letter in a less formal style because I know the people I sent the message to. In the cover letter I wanted to motivate the people to take the survey by telling them it would help me and that it could possibly teach something about themselves and their workplace that they have not thought of before. As I personally know the people I sent the survey to, I did not feel the need to try to sell it to them. The main motivator in answering the survey was probably the goodwill of my former colleagues.

In the cover letter I wrote about the structure of the survey; that it has statements and open questions. I also mentioned that the survey takes about 15 minutes. By informing about the length of the survey I wanted to make sure that the participants are prepared

to spend 15 minutes completing the survey and do not get frustrated because the survey is quite long. In the cover letter I also emphasized the anonymity of the survey because the subject may be of sensitive nature to some people, and I did not want this to be an obstacle in taking the survey. The cover letter is included as Attachment 1 in this thesis.

Because I had a tight schedule for the thesis, I could only keep the survey open for a week. As I only sent the survey to 12 people altogether, I think this was a sufficient amount of time to answer the survey. During the first four working days I had received four replies. I asked for the same former colleague who had sent the survey on my behalf in the first place to send a reminder to all the possible participants and advise them to take the survey in case they had not already done so. After this I got three more replies, which means that out of 12 recipients I received seven replies in total. The percentage of replies out of the number of people the survey was sent to is thus 58.

6 U.S. Embassy Finnish Staff's Social Identity: Results

This chapter discusses the results of the survey. In this chapter, I will discuss how the survey results are reported, and go through the results separately by each section of the survey. I will also discuss the connection between crisis communication and social identity in this chapter.

6.1 Reporting and Analyzing the Results

As I executed the survey in Webropol, the program formed figures and tables from the results automatically. However, I thought they were not clear enough, which is why I formed charts myself in order to display the survey results. I have included a chart in parts where I find it clarifies the results. All of the results of the structured statements are displayed in charts. The survey results are reported in chronological order. I will discuss each section of the survey separately, starting with respondent background information and moving on to the sections titled crisis communication, positive vision of the future, rhetoric of we, spokesperson as “one of us” and finally, social identity. In the end of each sub-chapter I make a conclusion of the section's results.

6.2 Respondent Background Information

There were seven respondents to the survey in total. This makes the response percentage 58. The first question regarding the background of the respondent was the citizenship and it was an open question. Of all the respondents, five were Finnish; one was American and one Canadian. Based on the results, it is useful to classify the respondents in two groups; Finnish (5 persons) and non-Finnish (2 persons) and see whether the two groups' answers differ. However, there are only two non-Finnish respondents to the survey, which causes that comparing the two groups is not very satisfying.

Regarding the question about the number of years of service in the U.S. Embassy Helsinki, the respondents could choose from four different scales of years. Four of the respondents had worked at the Embassy for 12 or more years. One had worked for 7–11 years, one for 3–6 years and one for 0–2 years. The results can be seen in Chart 1.

Based on the length of employment, two respondent groups can be formed: people who have worked for less than 12 years and people who have worked for 12 or more years. All the respondents who had worked for 12 or more years were Finnish. The differences between the groups (Finnish versus non-Finnish and over 12 years' versus under 12 years' employment) are reported only when there can be found clear response patterns between the groups.

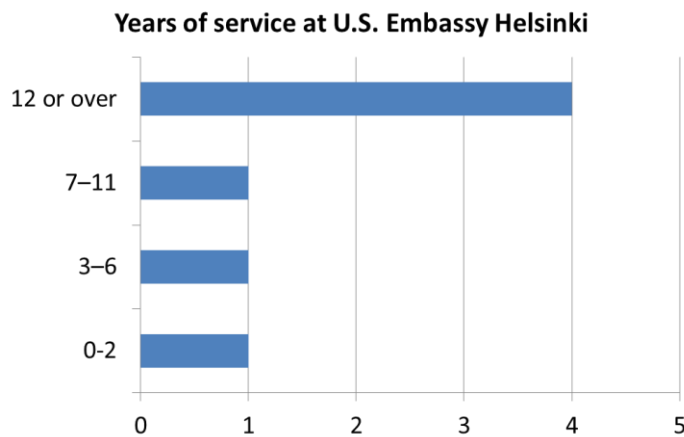


Chart 1. Respondents' number of years of service at U.S. Embassy Helsinki.

6.3 Crisis Communication at the Embassy

The purpose of the crisis communication section of the survey was to find out the Embassy employees thoughts on crisis communication that is executed by email, on a general level. The first statement of the section aimed in finding out if employees can recall reading crisis emails during their employment at the Embassy. From the total of seven respondents, four people recalled well or very well reading the emails. Three of the respondents gave a neutral response to the statement. None of the respondents answered that they do not recall reading the emails. The results can be seen in Chart 2.

I can recall reading emails regarding different crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks, storms, strikes etc. during my employment in the Embassy.

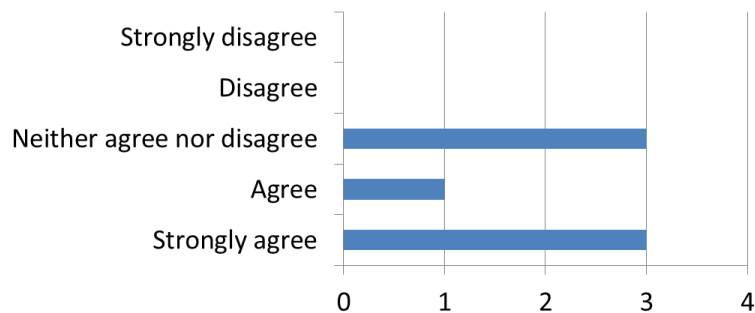


Chart 2. Employees' thoughts on recalling the crisis emails.

The section's second statement aimed at investigating how important it is for employees to be informed about crises even if they would not be directly affected by them. Most of the respondents consider the crisis emails important for them. Only one of the respondents gave a neutral response to the statement, whilst the rest of the respondents claimed that the crisis emails are important to them. Three of the respondents considered the emails very important. The exact results can be seen in Chart 3.

It is important for me to be informed about crises, even if they would not directly affect my work at the Embassy in Helsinki (eg. a storm in Florida or a terrorist attack in New York.)

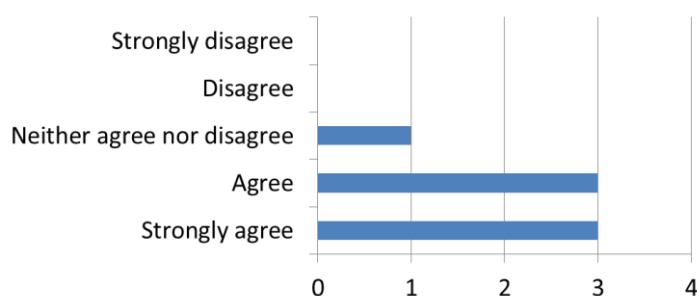


Chart 3. Employees' opinions on the importance of crisis emails.

The goal of the third statement was to see whether employees consider email as a suitable channel for informing about crises. All of the respondents considered email a suitable crisis communication channel. One person replied that email is a very suitable channel for crisis communication. The precise results can be seen in Chart 4.

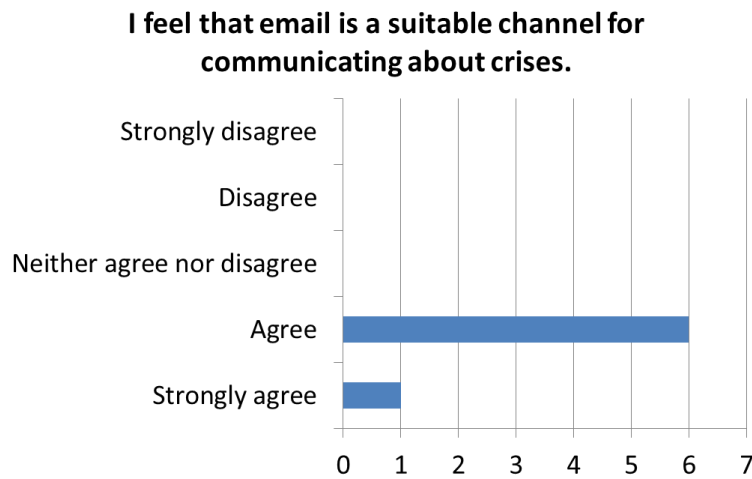


Chart 4. Employees' opinions on email as a suitable channel for crisis communication.

The final part of the section was an open question, aiming to research the employees' thoughts on the significance of informing about crises by email. From the total of six respondents in this question, four people described email as being a fast way of spreading information about crises. Three people also mentioned that in addition to speed, email can easily be used to reach multiple addressees. Two people said the significance of crisis emails can be accounted to them bringing about awareness. According to one respondent, "It is important to keep everyone up to date on crises affecting the United States and email is a relatively easy and fast forum to spread the word and news to all." One of the respondents mentioned email as being non-personal.

From the results of this section a conclusion can be drawn that the Embassy employees are familiar with crisis communication executed by email. From the results it can also be seen that the Embassy employees find crisis communication by email useful. It is clear that the employees desire to be informed about crises even if they would not be directly affected by them. All of the employees also consider email a suitable channel for crisis communication. It can thus be concluded that one of the reasons why all the respondents consider email a suitable channel for crisis communication is because it is fast and can reach a big group of people at once. However, this finding is a by-product of the survey and not directly relevant regarding my research.

6.4 Positive Vision of the Future

The goal of the section named “My work at the Embassy” was to find out how employees perceive the positive vision of the future projected in the crisis emails. The objective was also to see if the positive vision in the emails has any effect on the employees’ motivation towards their work at the Embassy. In the first statement of the section, which was to discover whether reading similar messages to the excerpt in the survey had a positive effect on employees will to do their best for the Embassy’s success, five respondents selected the neutral option. One respondent answered that the emails encourage them to do their best for the success of the Embassy. One person replied that the emails do not encourage them to do their best. The results can be seen in Chart 5.

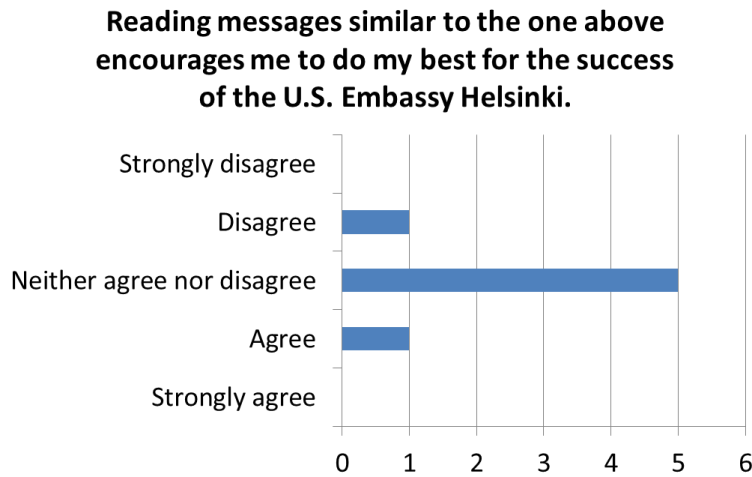


Chart 5. Respondents’ opinions on the crisis emails’ effect on employees’ will to do their best for the Embassy to succeed.

The aim of the second statement of the section was to find out whether the President’s vision of the future projected in the crisis emails increases the employees’ respect for their work. Four of the respondents did not have a strong opinion on the statement. At the same time, three respondents replied that the positive vision strengthens the respect they have for their work. The exact result can be seen in Chart 6.

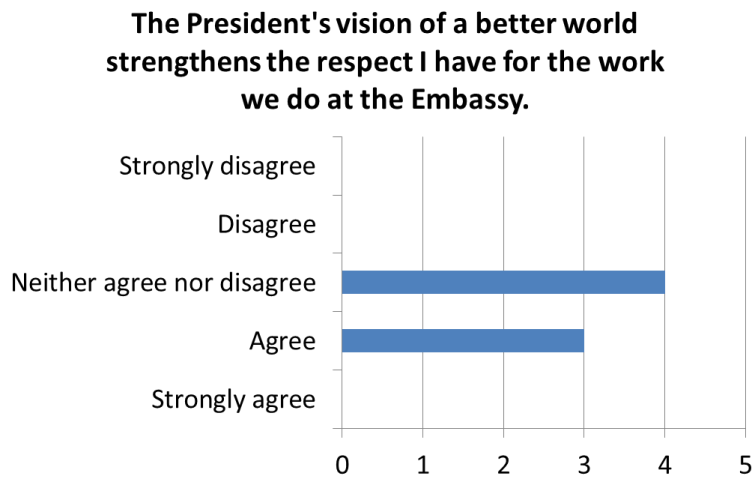


Chart 6. The respondents' opinions on the effect of the President's vision on the respect they have for their work at the Embassy.

The third statement inquired directly whether the employees consider the crisis emails having a positive effect on their motivation towards work. Three of the respondents agreed that the emails increase their motivation. Three respondents said the emails neither increase nor decrease their motivation. One person said the emails do not have an effect on their motivation towards work. The results can be found in Chart 7.

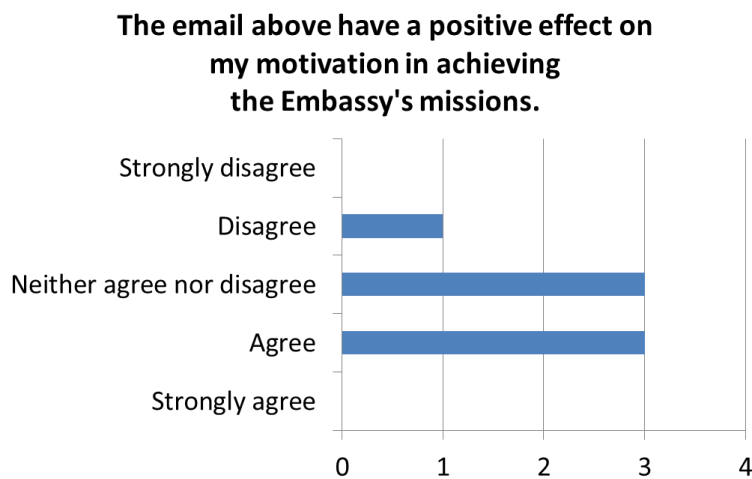


Chart 7. The respondents' thoughts on crisis emails having a positive effect on their motivation towards work.

The last part of the section was an open question, which was to figure out if the positive vision in the crisis emails inspired the employees to work harder. Four respondents replied that the positive vision projected in the crisis emails do not have any effect on the employee working harder. One of the respondents' answer was "my motivation comes from within. I don't seek the encouragement of others. I appreciate the solidarity such messages represent but I don't find them motivating in a professional sense." Two of the respondents claimed that the emails do have a positive effect on their motivation towards work. One of them mentioned that the positive vision in the emails increases their motivation: "Sure, you are being part of a larger group and mission." This is a very interesting statement from the viewpoint of the social identity approach because the motivation towards working is connected to being part of a group, as Haslam (2004, 67–79) suggests. One of the total of seven respondents did not have an opinion on the subject.

The results of this section show that some of the employees consider the positive vision represented in the emails a motivation booster, as the previously created theory for social identity approach to crisis communication would suggest. It can also be seen that a couple of the respondents feel that the crisis emails do not have a positive effect on their work motivation. Few respondents felt that the positive vision portrayed in the emails made them work harder. The reason for this can be that the respondents already feel they are working hard. However, two people gave a slightly affirmative response to the statement, reporting that the positive vision does inspire them to work harder. The desire of working harder due to the positive vision certainly demonstrates the potential of crisis communication based on a positive vision of the future. From the results a conclusion can be made that the crisis emails which present a positive vision of the future have a positive effect on some of the employees' motivation, and to some employees' motivation the emails do not have a significance.

6.5 Rhetoric of We

The purpose of the section "Myself as part of the Embassy community" was to find out whether the rhetoric of we as well as the use of the expression "family" in the crisis emails has a connection with how strongly the employees feel being part of the Em-

bassy community. The purpose of the section's first statement was to find out whether employees perceive as all U.S. Embassies worldwide as being one big family. From the total of seven respondents, five people said they felt all U.S. Embassies together feel like a big family. One of the respondents claimed they did not feel at all that the Embassies are a family. The exact results can be seen in Chart 8. All of the respondents who have worked for 12 or more years agreed or agreed strongly on the statement, while the respondents who had worked for less than 12 years gave varying replies from agreeing to strongly disagreeing with the statement. A cautious conclusion can be made from the results that a longer employment influences the sense of togetherness with other Embassies.

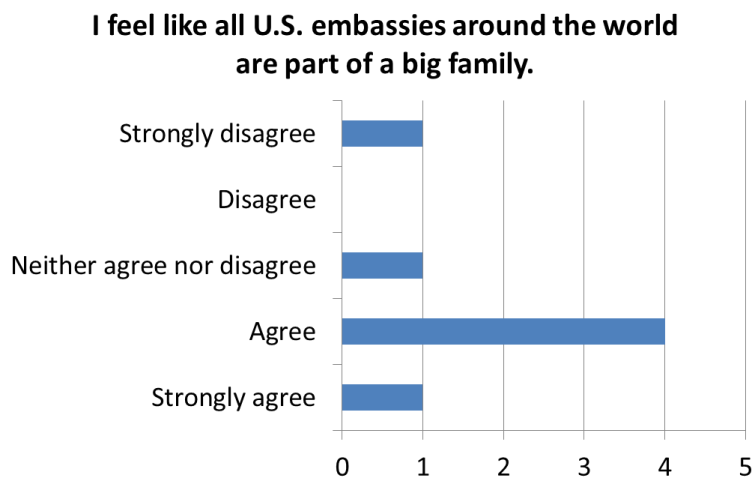


Chart 8. Employees' thoughts on the U.S. Embassies being a big family.

The purpose of the second statement of the section was to map the emails' strengthening effect on the employees' feelings of belonging to a family of Embassies. Three of the respondents said the crisis emails strengthen their feeling of being part of the family. The result supports the efficiency of the rhetoric of we, as the social identity approach to crisis communication suggests (see chapter 3.2.2.) Three people replied that the emails neither strengthen nor weaken their feeling of belonging to the family. One of the respondents reported the emails do not strengthen the feeling of belongingness to a family. The results can be found from Chart 9.

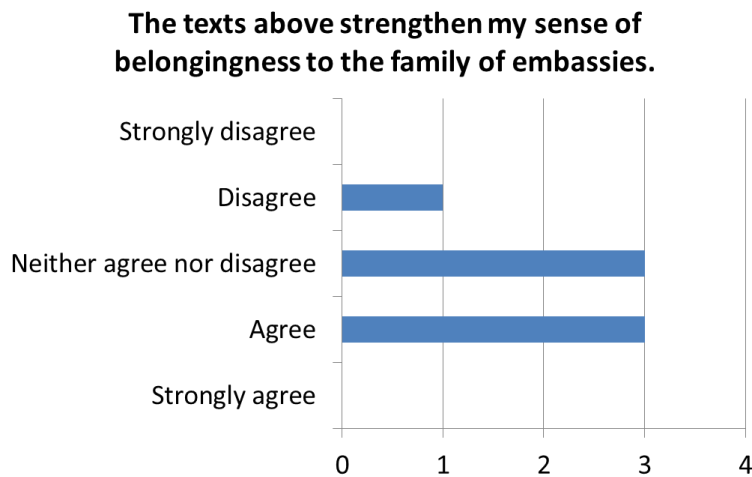


Chart 9. Employees' opinions on the emails strengthening their feeling of belonging to a family of Embassies.

The goal of the third statement was to find out how well employees can relate to expressions presented in the crisis emails, such as “our family” and “we work hard.” Four of the respondents said that it is neither easy nor hard for them to relate to such expressions. One of the respondents claimed that it is hard for them to relate to such expressions. The exact results can be found in Chart 10.

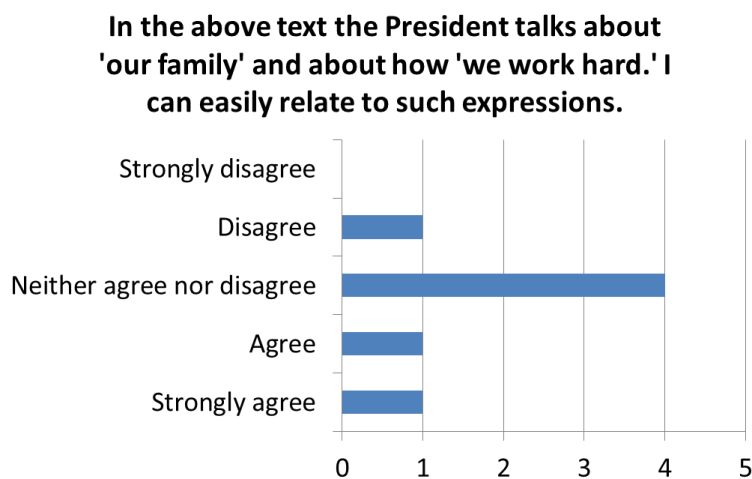


Chart 10. Employees' opinions on how well they can relate to expressions that pursue to create an impression of the crisis spokesperson of being “one of us.”

The open question of the section pursued to discover directly what the Embassy family means to the respondents. Six people responded to this question. Two of the respond-

ents replied that the Embassy family means, most of all, the people in the Embassy where they work at, not all the Embassies world-wide. One person replied: “I have a sense of relationship with colleagues serving around the world but my first sense of true and deeper relationship is within the Embassy where I serve or the region where I work.” Two respondents said the Embassy working environment is not a typical one and that they feel comfortable and safe working in this kind of environment. One of the respondents’ reply to the question of the meaning of the Embassy family was that all Embassy employees globally work together to reach a common goal. This statement corresponds exactly with the idea of the social identity approach (discussed in chapter 3.1.), which suggests that the belongingness to the group (i.e. the family of Embassies) is the stronger the more people are able to perceive the goals of the group as shared (Wegge & Haslam 2003, 43–59).

From all the results of this section a conclusion can be made that, generally, the Embassy employees consider the Embassy they work for somewhat family-like. Some of the respondents replied that they feel that the crisis emails strengthen their feeling of belongingness to the family of U.S. Embassies. However, there is not a clear link between the family rhetoric presented in the crisis emails and the level of employees considering the Embassy their family.

6.6 Spokesperson as “One of Us”

The purpose of the section “Organization” was to find out whether the employees perceive the crisis spokesperson as “one of us.” The first statement pursued to acquire information on the employees’ opinions on the top management’s interest in them as Embassy employees. In this statement, three respondents said they felt the top management neither is interested nor is not interested in them as Embassy employees. Two of the respondents replied they felt the top management is interested in them. Two respondents felt the top management is not very interested in them as Embassy employees. The results can be seen in Chart 11.

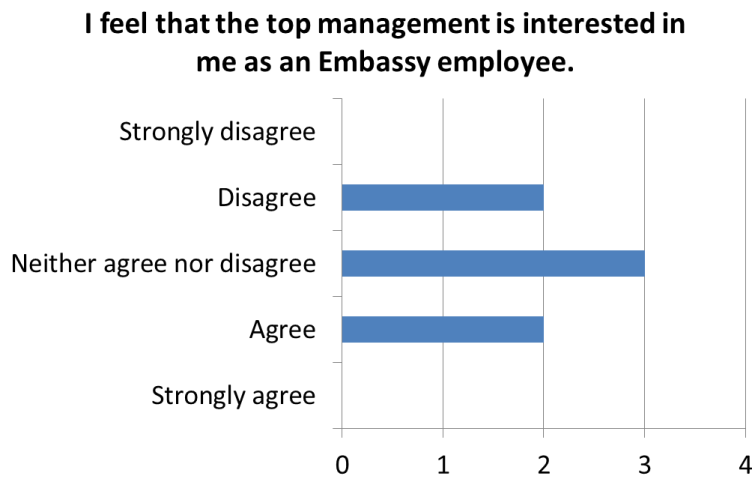


Chart 11. Employees' feelings on the top management's interest in them as Embassy employees.

The goal of the section's second statement was to find out whether the employees think they are working towards the same goals as the top management. Three of the respondents replied to the statement by reporting that they feel they are working towards the same goals together with the top management. Three people replied they feel they neither are working nor they are not working towards the same goals. One person responded they felt they are not working towards the same goals. As argued in chapter 3.1., shared goals indicate belongingness into the same group. From the point of view of shared goals, a few respondents feel togetherness with the top management. It can thus be concluded that three respondents possibly perceive the top management as being "one of us." The results are displayed in Chart 12.

The purpose of the third statement was to measure the employees' values; whether the employees feel they share the same values as the top management. It was stated previously in chapter 5.2. that having a common set of values is a factor that connects group members (Haslam et al. 2011, 50, 53–55). In this statement, the majority of the respondents replied they feel they neither share nor do not share the same values with the top management. Two of the respondents said they feel they share values with the top management. Consequently, the results of this statement do not speak strongly for or against of the employees perceiving the top management as "one of us." The precise results can be found in Chart 13.

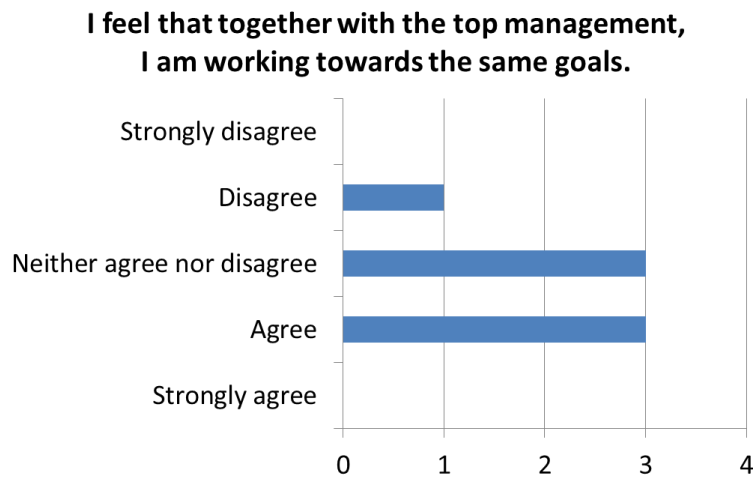


Chart 12. Respondents' opinions on themselves working towards the same goals as the top management.

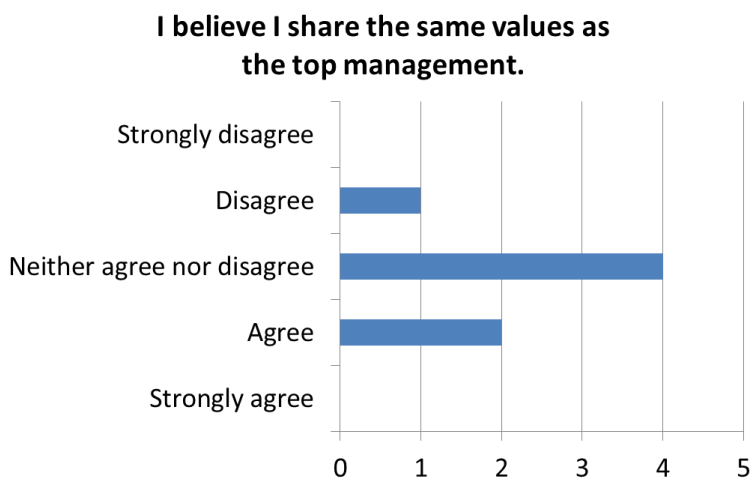


Chart 13. Employees' feeling on themselves sharing the same values as the top management.

In the open question of the section respondents were asked to describe the top management's leadership in crisis situations. From the total of seven survey respondents, four people answered this question. Half of the respondents thought that the top management is active in their leadership in crisis situations. One of the respondents replied that "For the most part they seem to react promptly to crises to show that they care and and reassure colleagues." One of the respondents describes the top management's leadership insulated in crisis situations and says that the top management is more worried about public posture.

The results of this section show that some of the respondents can relate to the crisis spokesperson as being “one of us.” However, more respondents seem to have a neutral feeling about the crisis spokesperson. Some of the respondents find it difficult to perceive the crisis spokespersons, the top management, as being “one of us.” However, two respondents consider the top management an active and quick responder to crises.

6.7 Social Identity

The purpose of the section “Myself as an Embassy employee” was to research the employees’ social identity in more detail. The first statement of the section pursued to find out how proud employees are of working at the U.S. Embassy. Five respondents reported that they are either proud or very proud to be able to say that they work at the Embassy. Two respondents chose the neutral option, while none of the respondents replied they are not proud of their workplace. The results are displayed in Chart 14. The respondent’s high level of proudness of their workplace would suggest, based on the social identity theory, that the Embassy has a positive effect on the employees’ self-image. A positive self-image through a social group results in a salient social identity (see explanation in chapter 3.1.).

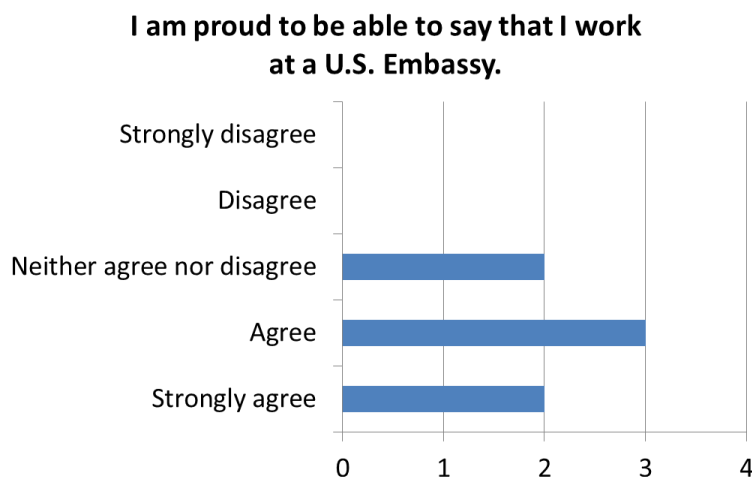


Chart 14. Respondents’ feelings on how proud they are about working at the Embassy.

The goal of the section’s second statement was to investigate how well the respondents’ acquaintances are aware that the respondents work at the U.S. Embassy. Six of

the respondents reported that amongst their acquaintances, it is either well known or very well known that they work at the Embassy. Only one person replied that it is not well known that they work at the Embassy. The results can be seen in Chart 15. All the Finnish respondents who reported they have worked at the Embassy for 12 or more years answered that it is well-known amongst their acquaintances that they work at the Embassy. On the contrary, one respondent with Finnish nationality disagreed strongly with the statement. From the results it can be concluded that for many respondents, the Embassy community defines the employees' self, i.e. the Embassy is part of who they are also outside work. The Embassy group has thus become a defining factor of the employees' identity (social identity.)

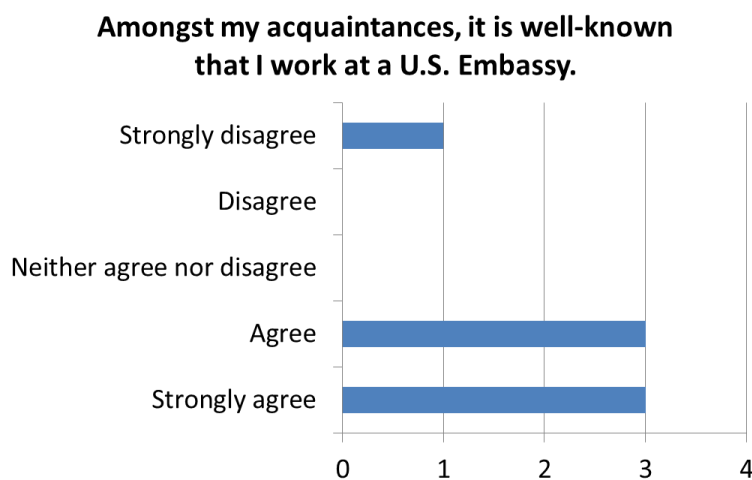


Chart 15. Respondent's thoughts on how well their acquaintances awareness of them working at the U.S. Embassy.

The aim of the third statement was to find out how willing the employees are to mention their workplace to a new person. Three of the respondents answered they are either willing or very willing to mention their workplace. Three respondents gave a neutral response to the statement. One respondent replied they are not very willing to mention that they work at the Embassy. The results can be found in Chart 16. If a group is important to a person's identity, it is likely for the person to gladly and readily bring it up in a conversation with a new acquaintance (Haslam et al. 2011, 52–54). The results would thus suggest that most of the employees consider the Embassy an important building block of their identity. Presenting oneself through the social category

(a U.S. Embassy employee) indicates that depersonalization has occurred, as presented in chapter 3.1.



Chart 16. Employees' willingness to mention their workplace when meeting a new person.

The fourth statement of the section aimed at finding out how important the employees consider the Embassy compared to all the groups they belong to. Three of the respondents claimed that the Embassy is one of the most important groups they belong to. Two people responded neutrally, whilst two respondents replied that they do not consider the Embassy one of the most important groups. The exact results can be seen in Chart 17. Perceiving the Embassy category as one of the most important groups would suggest that the group functions as a source of social identity for the employees.

The last statement of the section pursued to find out employees' opinions on whether they consider the Embassy more than just a workplace. Four of the respondents replied they consider the Embassy more than a workplace. Two people reported that they do not consider the Embassy more than just a workplace. One respondent gave a neutral response to the statement. The results are on display in Chart 18. If an employee considers the Embassy more than a workplace, it signifies that they consider the group having other meanings than just work. The previously discussed open question "What does the Embassy family mean to you?" of the section "Myself as part of the Embassy community" sheds light on what these other meanings can be. The two respondents who disagreed with the statement can be assumed to perceive the Embassy

as mainly a workplace. In this case, the workplace as a group thus does not contribute to these individuals' social identity.

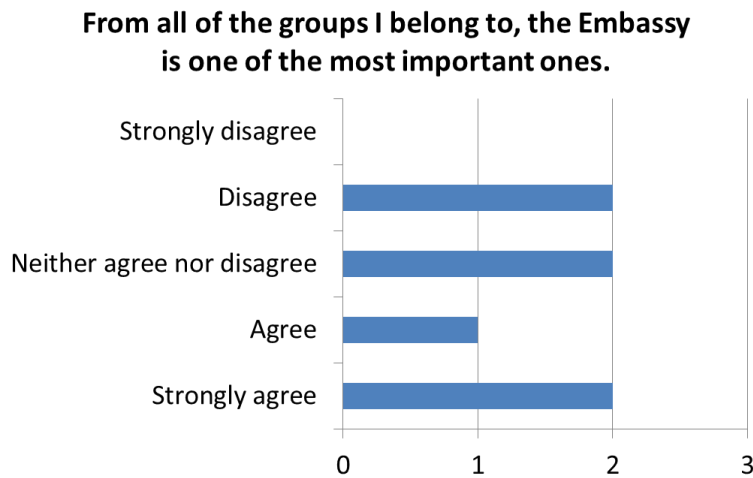


Chart 17. Employees' feelings about the Embassy as one of the most important groups they belong to.

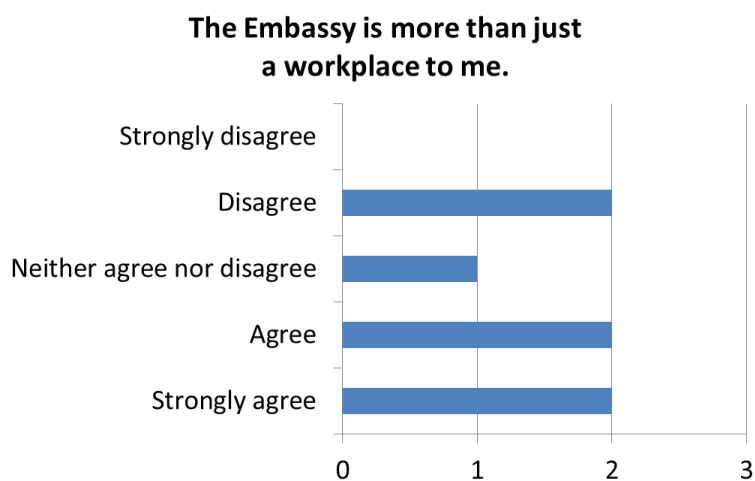


Chart 18. Respondents' opinions on the Embassy as being more than just a workplace.

The last part of the section was an open question and the objective of it was to find out how employees feel about being part of the Embassy community. Six people responded to this question. Five of the respondents described the way they feel about their Embassy membership using positive expressions. Only one of the respondents replied very neutrally, reporting that they consider the Embassy as any workplace, only having a difference in security procedures. Some of the responses can be seen below.

- I feel privileged to represent my country, especially in a portfolio that advances prosperity, generates opportunity and improves the lives of citizens in the U.S. and equally important, in the host nations where I serve.
- It is an interesting workplace and how to get involved with the Embassy community activities [sic] is up to oneself. It is a good community to interact when possible.
- Like I mentioned above, for me personally, it allows me to work with friends and colleagues from the same background and part of the world. Being a foreigner in Finland the Embassy community gives me the opportunity to interact and be with people whom I can relate to in a different way versus Finnish people. I believe [sic] there can be some improvements made to involve more interaction but for the most part if one is willing to be involved there are great opportunities [sic] in the Embassy community.
- I am very proud to be a member of the community. It really is a world of its own.

From this section's results a conclusion can be drawn that the Embassy employees are generally proud of their workplace and consider the Embassy community important to themselves. The results show that the respondents value and appreciate the Embassy community. In this section the results were generally quite mixed. However, the results suggest that the Embassy functions as a source of social identity for some of the employees.

6.8 Connection between Social Identity and Crisis Communication

After having analyzed the results of each section of the survey we can now proceed to take a look at the third research question I had set for this thesis:

3. Is there a connection between how the employees feel about the crisis communication and how they sense their belongingness?

If a link between a high salience of social identity and a positive perception of crisis communication could be found, it would demonstrate that crisis communication can be used as a means to make social identity salient, as the social identity approach to crisis communication suggests (see chapter 3.1.) Thus, the purpose of this sub-chapter is to see whether there is a connection between the high salience of social identity and positive perception of crisis communication on an individual level. The results of the survey by respondent can be found from Attachment 3. The tables in Attachment 3 enable the comparing of individual respondents' answers and following a single respondent's answers section by section. In the tables, each respondent is coded from A to G and the statements and questions are numbered from 1 to 24.

The results can be illustrated by using two extreme respondents; the high identifier (respondent E, see Attachment 3) and the low identifier (respondent B). The high identifier considered the Embassy more than a workplace and that the Embassy has relevance also in the respondent's life outside work, i.e. the Embassy contributes to the respondent's identity. The low identifier considered the Embassy as mainly a workplace and did not perceive the crisis emails as crafting the sense of belongingness to the group. I will use these two respondents to demonstrate the connection between crisis communication and social identity. It is worthwhile mentioning that both the high and low identifier were Finnish with an employment of 12 or more years. There could not be made many generalizations on the grounds of the nationality or length of employment, as the responses did not follow any pattern on the basis of these variables.

The high identifier strongly agreed that it is with proudness that they work at the Embassy, that the Embassy is one of the most important groups they belong to and that the Embassy is more than just a workplace to them. What is more interesting is that the same respondent considered the rhetoric of we the most persuasive compared to the other respondents. This respondent claimed that the crisis emails strengthen the sense of belongingness to the Embassy family. In addition, the respondent strongly agreed that all U.S. Embassies worldwide are part of a big family and that they can easily relate to the President's expressions such as "our family" and "we work hard." This

demonstrates how the receptiveness of the rhetoric of we is connected to a high social identity.

Should we continue analyzing the same respondent's (high identifier) answers it is worthwhile looking into his or her answers to the open questions. In the question "What does the Embassy family mean to you?" the high identifier answers by saying that the all the Embassy employees work together to reach a common goal. This goes hand in hand with the social identity approach, which suggests that a sense of common goals is one of the criteria of having a salient social identity (Wegge & Haslam 2003, 48–51). The high identifier also thinks that the President's positive vision of the future strengthens the respect he or she has for their work. However, the respondent does not feel that the vision encourages him or her to work harder or to achieve the Embassy's goals. The explanation for this could be that the respondent thinks that they are already working as hard as they can and that nothing can further increase their motivation.

Despite the attempts to portray the crisis spokesperson as "one of us," the Embassy employees do not feel strong togetherness with the top management based on the responses. Even the high identifier feels this way. The high identifier responded that he or she does not feel that the top management is interested as them as an Embassy employee or that he or she is working towards the same goals together with the top management. The reason why the respondents cannot easily perceive the spokesperson as "one of us" is understandable from an average employee's perspective. We must keep in mind that in all of the email excerpts displayed in the survey, Secretary Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama acted as the crisis spokespersons. Only the distance in status alone is likely to lessen the sense of togetherness between the employees and top management. In addition, solely geographical distance could make the sense of belongingness with the top management more challenging.

From the results it can be found also a low identifier whose answers can be compared to the high identifier's. The low identifier claims that the Embassy is just like any other workplace and does not consider the group particularly important. The respondent's

opinions on the positive vision of the future, the rhetoric of we and the spokesperson as “one of us” are fairly neutral. The respondent thus does not consider such elements used in crisis communication especially persuasive. This, too, fits with the assumption of social identity approach to crisis communication, but in an opposite direction. Hence, a low social identity is connected to a perception of crisis communication as nonpersuasive.

All in all, due to the small size of the sample, the answers to the third research question remain slightly ambiguous. In fact, this is why I chose to illustrate the results by using the two extreme respondents’ answers. There is some evidence that the perception of crisis communication is connected to the level of social identity. However, the clear causation that crisis communication results in a salient social identity cannot be proved based on this study. This is because it is also plausible that a high identifier perceives the crisis communication more persuasive because of his or her identification to the group. To show that crisis communication results in the identification to a group, it would require a different kind of study, which is discussed in chapter 7.

7 Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the results of my research. I will discuss how well I achieved the objectives I had set, assess the research methods and the research validity and reliability. I will also discuss my personal learning process and further developments that could be made on the basis of this study.

7.1 Assessment of Objectives and Research Method

The objective of this thesis was to research how social identity is attempted to be created and strengthened in the U.S. Embassy Helsinki crisis communication by email. The purpose was also to discover how Embassy employees perceive the crisis emails and find out whether the emails have an effect on the employees' social identity. The planning of this thesis began in the spring of 2013 and the work was finished in November 2013. In order to achieve the objectives of this thesis, a text analysis on the crisis emails of U.S. Embassy was done, as well as an internet survey. In the text analysis, the emails regarding crises were researched on the basis of a theory on the social identity approach to crisis communication created in chapter 3. The theory was applied to the emails with an objective to see if the crisis communication in the emails is in line with what the theory suggests.

In order to achieve the objectives I had set for this thesis, I used a qualitative research strategy; a text analysis and a survey. The purpose of the text analysis was to see how social identity pursued to be created and strengthened via crisis emails. The results of the text analysis showed that the U.S. Embassy crisis communication by email is a clear demonstration of an attempt to strengthen the employees' social identity. An internet survey was executed in order to research Embassy employees' thoughts on crisis communication via email, as well as to investigate how employees perceive themselves as part of the Embassy community. The survey was taken by seven people, which means that the response percentage was 58. In reference to the respondents' background information, there existed hoped-for variety.

I found the method of using a text analysis and a survey the best option for researching the subject. I was able to get clear answers to the two first research questions and approximate answers to the third research question. Hence, the research was generally successful. Although the method of this thesis was qualitative, some of the survey results can be analyzed using quantitative method. However, the sample is very small (seven persons), which in most cases is not a sufficient number to make any quantitative generalizations. Basically, the research is qualitative but some quantitative conclusions can be made on the basis of the survey results.

By executing the text analysis on the crisis communication of the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki by email, I found out that the emails generally have the elements in them that the social identity approach suggests. As the emails included various suggested ways of building and strengthening social identity, a conclusion could be made that, in theory, the emails have a possibility of making the employees' social identity salient. Regarding the research strategy for this thesis, I found the text analysis a good choice. As email is a key tool in informing about crises in the Embassy, it was important to analyze particularly the messages sent by using this channel. The weakness of a text analysis is that it is only one person's interpretation, which makes the research strategy subjective. This is why I decided to use an additional strategy to research the subject in more depth; the survey. I also had a limited amount of email material to use, as I had collected all the material I used in the text analysis during the time of my internship at the Embassy. With a larger amount of material, there would probably have been a slightly greater variety in the different types of emails. However, I do believe the emails I used in the analysis present quite well the whole of crisis emails at the Embassy.

The other research strategy for this thesis was an internet survey. By doing the survey I discovered that the Embassy employees value the crisis communication via email, and consider it useful even if the crisis would not directly affect them. I also found out that the employees generally perceive the expressions and ideas presented in the emails positive. Even though there was some variety between the respondents, it was clear that the emails are appreciated. Regarding variation between respondents who were Finnish versus American cannot be compared very well due to the fact that only one American

took the survey. Neither can the differences between lengths of employment be compared between the respondents, as four of the participants who have worked for 12 or more years at the Embassy were all Finnish. In the other three employment length scales, there is one respondent in each. The factors of citizenship and length of employment thus cannot be compared in a quantitative way. However, the survey does provide approximate results regarding these factors.

I find that the survey was a good way to research employees' opinions on the subject. As the survey could be accessed on the internet, it was convenient for the respondents. The survey included some text excerpts from the crisis emails and reading them took time, which naturally extended the time required for answering the survey. However, I mentioned that the survey will take about 15 minutes in both the cover letter and in the actual survey to make sure the respondents were prepared to take their time to complete the survey.

7.2 Research Reliability and Validity

Out of the total of seven survey respondents, five were Finnish; one was American and one Canadian. As a sample, this is not the best one, as there is roughly the same number of Americans as Finns working at the Embassy. Because the sample does not represent the population in the best way, it reduces the reliability slightly. However, the survey does provide approximate results. I sent the survey to 12 Embassy employees and received seven replies, which makes the response percentage 58. This is a fairly good result. As the emphasis of this thesis is on qualitative research, seven responses is an adequate number. From a quantitative perspective, however, the results of only seven respondents cannot be generalized as representing the whole population. Consequently, the reliability of the research would have been even greater if the survey would have been sent to all Embassy employees.

The survey statements and questions were based on the theoretical framework created in chapter 3. The survey was divided into sections, and the purpose of each section was to research a separate element of the theoretical framework. Excerpts of emails were included into the survey to clarify the subject of research and thus facilitate responding

to the survey. The scale from 1 to 5 in the structured statements worked generally well. It was important that the scale ranged from 1 to 5, giving the respondents the possibility to select the neutral option. A scale from 1 to 4 would have forced the respondents to agree or disagree on the statement even though they would not have had any opinion on the statement, which could have distorted the results. The option 3, neither agree nor disagree, was there also in case the respondents would not have understood the question.

As there does not exist an established way to measure social identity and because many different ways of measuring social identity are used in different researches, it was quite challenging to pick the right statements for measuring social identity in this study. For example, in addition to asking the employees about common values and goals in the section “Organization” in the survey, it would have been a good choice to ask directly whether the employees are able to perceive the spokesperson as “one of us.” Hence, if I would execute the same study on the whole Embassy, I would include this statement in the survey.

7.3 Evaluation of Own Learning

I selected the topic for my thesis on the basis that I find the psychological aspect behind crisis communication very fascinating. The topic I chose was challenging in many ways. Firstly, the social identity approach is a very complex, intricate and dynamic as a psychological theory. Compared to many other psychological theories, the social identity approach is not one of the simplest ones. However, the social identity approach has proved to be successfully applied to many fields, such as organizational psychology and organizational behavior. Because of this I had the confidence in applying the approach to crisis communication as well, despite the demandingness and the complexity of the approach.

The topic was challenging also because I had to see into two different themes instead of one; social psychology and crisis communication, which made the task more demanding. In addition, the social identity approach has never been applied to crisis communication before, which means I had to create the theoretical framework myself.

This was both challenging and excitingly inspirational. Finally, the security protocol at the Embassy posed its own challenges in completing this thesis.

During the thesis process I learned a lot about crisis communication and the social identity approach. The social psychological aspect proposed the greater challenge of the two subjects in completing this thesis. Because the social identity theory is somewhat complicated and included many new terms for me, I had to familiarize myself with them before I could write about the topic. By really digging deep into both of the subjects of crisis communication and the social identity approach, I developed a broad understanding on them. I also understood how the two can be combined and how they have a possibility of correlating with each other. After completing my research, I feel like I have a good understanding of what is good and effective crisis communication. I also know what kind of crisis communication is recommendable to execute in order to strengthen the stakeholders' social identity.

Besides the researched subjects, during the thesis process I learned a lot about project and time management as well as how proper research should be executed. I had some difficulties in managing the timeframe in which I would complete the thesis. As the topic was very challenging, it took a lot of time to formulate the idea of what I am actually researching and how. I also found it difficult to do a specific schedule for completing the thesis when I first started working on it because I was not sure about the schedule for other school work and courses. Because my overall schedule turned out to be different from what I had earlier prepared for, I could not progress according to the schedule I had made for this thesis. Consequently, besides having a final deadline I did not have a fixed schedule for the thesis, which made the time management for this project more difficult. However, I had decided that I want to finish the thesis on time, which kept me on track. I have definitely learned about this experience time management-wise and will know what to do differently should I have another project of this size in the future.

Regardless of all the challenges I faced in completing this thesis, I think that I managed to do a good job. One of the greatest benefits of this work must be the knowledge I

acquired during the process. It is apparent that certain kind of crisis communication can affect employees' social identity in a positive way, which could lead to the better overall success of an organization. I think that the connection between crisis communication and social identity should be researched more, so that organizations could assess their style of crisis communication and take into account the effect it has on the social identity of the members of the organization.

7.4 Conclusion

I believe that the results of this research can be of use to the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki as well as the whole U.S. State Department. The results of the research could also be of interest to any kind of organization assessing and planning their crisis communication strategy. A similar research to the one implemented in this thesis has never been executed before. Moreover, the social identity approach has never been applied to crisis communication before, which increases the novelty value of this thesis. The research provides insights on the U.S. Embassy crisis communication by email and illuminates the employees' thoughts on the subject. In addition, the research gives indicative results of how crisis communication affects social identity. However, the results are only approximate and in order to research the correlation between crisis communication and the salience of social identity, a different kind of research strategy should be used.

The results this thesis showed that the employees' social identity is in a clear way attempted to be created and strengthened in the crisis emails by portraying a positive vision of the future, using the rhetoric of we and portraying the crisis spokesperson as "one of us." The results of the survey demonstrated that some of the employees perceive such crisis communication as increasing their respect for their working community as well as their motivation towards work. In consequence, the perception of crisis communication is connected with the salience of social identity. However, the causality of the two variables cannot be ascertained solely on the basis of this study.

7.5 Further Developments

Because the causality between crisis communication and social identity could not be ascertained with the chosen method in this study, it would require a more experimental research approach which is commonly used amongst social psychologists. This thesis at hand could serve as basis to conduct the experimental research.

The correlation between crisis communication and the salience of social identity could be researched by doing an interview or a survey for two different groups. The first group (control group) would be asked questions about crisis communication and social identity without showing any pieces of crisis communication that pursues to make the social identity salient. The other group (treatment group) would be asked the same questions, but they would also be primed by showing some social identity boosting crisis communication excerpts and subsequent structured discussion. This way it could be seen whether there is any difference in the salience of the two groups' social identity. Similar experiments have been executed before on different areas of organizational behavior (see e.g. Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds & Turner 1999), but no experiments have been made regarding the effects of crisis communication on social identity.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. Survey cover letter

Hi,

I am writing to you regarding my thesis. While I was doing my internship at the U.S. Commercial Service in Helsinki in the fall of 2012, I decided that I wanted to write my thesis on the topic of crisis communication in the U.S. Embassy Helsinki.

Your thoughts on this topic would provide valuable information on crisis communication, and at the same time you would be helping out a former colleague on her way to graduating as a management assistant.

So, let's get down to business; I'd like you to take a survey. In addition to helping me out, by taking the survey you might learn something new about yourself and the way you think about your workplace, that you haven't noticed before.

During my internship at the Embassy, I noticed that I was regularly receiving informative emails regarding different crises that were going on at the moment, such as the attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya and Hurricane Sandy. Inspired by this, I am now in the midst of working on my thesis and would appreciate your contribution to my research.

In my thesis, I research the thoughts of U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees on crisis communication. My objective is to find out whether the crisis-related emails received by Embassy staff have any effect on the way employees perceive themselves as part of the working community.

To refresh your memory, the survey includes short excerpts of emails sent to all Embassy employees regarding different crises. In the survey, you will be asked to

answer questions and give your opinions on different statements regarding these emails.

The survey is completely anonymous and no one, including me, will be able to recognize an individual survey respondent on the basis of the answers.

The survey takes about 15 minutes and can be accessed here:

<https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/0FC3491B8BAEE7DA.par>

I kindly ask you to answer the survey by **Thursday 24 October** the latest.

I appreciate your time taken to complete the survey and wish you a very happy and cozy autumn!

Best regards,

Suvi Järvinen

HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants

suvi.jarvinen@myy.haaga-helia.fi

U.S. Embassy Survey

The purpose of this survey is to research U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees' thoughts on crisis communications.

A crisis is an event that threatens an organization's tangible or intangible resources in some way, such as terrorism, natural disasters or poor risk management. Crisis communication means communicating before, during and after a crisis in order to lessen the negative outcomes of the crisis.

This survey consists of statements and open questions. All sections marked with a star are compulsory. The survey takes about 15 minutes.

In the majority of the following sections, there are a couple of email excerpts related to crisis situations followed by different statements. The excerpts are taken from emails which have been sent to all U.S. Embassy Helsinki employees.

After reading the excerpts, please select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each of the statements. (1= Strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.) You can only choose one alternative.

Please start by filling in your background information.

Background information

1. Citizenship *

2. Years of service at U.S. Embassy Helsinki *

- ☐ 0-2
☐ 3-6
☐ 7-11
☐ 12 or over

Crisis communication

Please select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each statement.

3. I can recall reading emails regarding different crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks, storms, strikes etc. during my employment in the Embassy. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

4. It is important for me to be informed about crises, even if they would not directly affect my work at the Embassy in Helsinki (eg. a storm in Florida or a terrorist attack in New York.) *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

5. I feel that email is a suitable channel for communicating about crises. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

6. To you, what is the significance of informing about crises by email?

My work at the Embassy

Please read carefully the following email excerpt and select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each statement.

"And I hope that if you can take away one single thing from this tragedy, that we're going to redouble our efforts and strengthen our resolve... Take heart that no matter how difficult this particular day is, what you guys are doing every single day is making the world better."

President Obama on 12 September 2012 on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya.

7. Reading messages similar to the one above encourages me to do my best for the success of the U.S. Embassy Helsinki. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

8. The President's vision of a better world strengthens the respect I have for the work we do at the Embassy. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

9. The email above have a positive effect on my motivation in achieving the Embassy's missions. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

10. Does the positive vision projected in the crisis-related emails inspire you to work harder? If yes, how?

Myself as part of the Embassy community

Please read carefully the following email excerpts and select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each statement.

"So this is a setback today, and part of our family has been lost. But don't lose that sense of hopefulness. Don't lose that sense that somehow the world is not subject to our better selves. If we work hard enough and smart enough, then over time we move the world in a better direction."

President Obama on 12 September on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya

"After nearly four years of working closely with you, and visiting embassies, consulates and domestic facilities, I am honored to be a member of this incredible family. I thank you for your service, from the bottom of my heart."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 18 September 2012 on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya

11. I feel like all U.S. embassies around the world are part of a big family. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

12. The texts above strengthen my sense of belongingness to the family of embassies. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

13. In the above text the President talks about 'our family' and about how 'we work hard.' I can easily relate to such expressions. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

14. What does the Embassy family mean to you?

Organization

Please read carefully the following email excerpts and select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each statement.

"And what I know has always been one of America's greatest gifts to the world, one of our greatest traits as a people, is the fact that we're not made up of a single tribe, a single religion or a single race, but we're this collection of strivers and dreamers, people from all around the world who came here because we all agreed on a creed, on a set of principles – the idea that all men and women are created equal, that we're all endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights – that these aren't just American rights, they're not just Western rights; they are aspirations that people in the smallest village in Libya or in the most prosperous cities in Europe all believe in and care about, and that part of our task is to make sure that the way we project power as the greatest nation on Earth is consistent with those values."

President Obama on 12 September 2012 on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya

"I wanted to reach out to you directly after this challenging week, and express my gratitude for everything you do to advance our nation's interests and values. That is how we keep faith with those we serve and honor those we've lost. Even after four years, I continue to be amazed by your dedication, energy, and talent. It is a privilege to be part of your team... We need to learn from the tragedy in Benghazi, and make every possible improvement -- and we will."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 27 December 2012 in her farewell message to all colleagues

15. I feel that the top management is interested in me as an Embassy employee.

*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

16. I feel that together with the top management, I am working towards the same goals. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

17. I believe I share the same values as the top management. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

18. How would you describe the leadership of the top management in crisis situations?

Myself as an Embassy employee

Please read carefully the following email excerpts and select the alternative that best describes your opinion in each statement.

"Because one thing that I'm absolutely confident about is that when we lead with our values, we lead with our ideas, and we don't shy away from the world, and we're not consumed by cynicism, but the belief that we can make things a little bit better. But when we embrace that, then we're securing a better future for our kids and our grandkids and all those Americans to come."

"So I hope that alongside your sorrow today, all of you also take a moment to reflect on how important your work is and to remind yourselves that it's not that often in life where you're allowed to really make a difference, where you're put in a position where what you do matters, that changes lives."

President Obama on 12 September 2012 on the terrorist attack to the U.S. Embassy in Libya

19. I am proud to be able to say that I work at a U.S. Embassy. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

20. Amongst my acquaintances, it is well-known that I work at a U.S. Embassy.

*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

21. When I meet new people, I am happy to mention my workplace. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

22. From all of the groups I belong to, the Embassy is one of the most important ones. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

23. The Embassy is more than just a workplace to me. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly disagree

24. How do you feel about being a member of the Embassy community?

Attachment 3. Survey results by respondent

Background information and Crisis communication

		Statement/Question					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Respondent	A	USA	3-6	1	1	2	It is a quick way to reach multiple addressees to convey defined level of information.
	B	Finnish	12 or over	3	2	2	Fastest way to reach out to big group of people in a short notice.
	C	Finnish	12 or over	2	2	2	It is a fast way of communicating. Also very non-personal...
	D	Canadian	0-2	1	1	1	It is important to keep everyone up to date on crises affecting the United States and email is a relatively easy and fast forum to spread the word and news to all.
	E	Finnish	12 or over	1	3	2	I would pay more attention to the message if it was distributed via e-mail as I follow my e-mails very closely.
	F	suomi	7-11	3	1	2	-
	G	Finnish	12 or over	3	2	2	Awareness.

1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree and
5=Strongly disagree

My work at the Embassy and
Myself as part of the Embassy community

				Statement/Question							
				7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Respondent	A	3	2	3	No, my motivation comes from within. I don't seek the encouragement of others. I appreciate the solidarity such messages represent but I don't find them motivating in a professional sense.			3	3	4	I have a sense of relationship with colleagues serving around the world but my first sense of true and deeper relationship is within the Embassy where I serve or the region where I work. At times this "circle" is expanded when I have a person with whom I've worked posted at a Mission 'In the news.'
	B	4	3	3	No. Attack is always a serious invasion and it cannot be considered something positive.			2	3	3	co-workers in the same embassy, not embassies all over the world.
	C	3	3	2	Sure, you are being part of a larger group and mission.			2	2	3	Working environment which quite unusual and not very common in the regular business world. There is a certain protocol in place for doing things which also brings safety and continuity. It is also the 'American Way' of taking action and caring for people.
	D	2	2	2	Yes in a way. However crises as such have very little impact on the actual work I do here in Helsinki. It is a good reminder though that there is evil all around us.			2	3	2	The Embassy 'family' to me means a comfortable North American environment to work in. It is an atypical work environment where one gets to experience two different working cultures throughout the day. I feel very comfortable at the embassy.
	E	3	2	4	Indifferent.			1	2	1	We all work together to reach a common goal.
	F	3	3	2	not really			5	4	3	kahdeksantuntisia " ystäväpäiviä"
	G	3	3	3	No.			2	2	3	

1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree and

5=Strongly disagree

Organization and Myself as an Embassy employee

	Statement/Question										
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
Respondent	A	4	3	3	Insulated, worried more about the public posture. Benghazi is a perfect example of detached leadership that enabled tragedy.	1	2	2	3	1	I feel privileged to represent my country, especially in a portfolio that advances prosperity, generates opportunity and improves the lives of citizens in the U.S. and equally important, in the host nations where I serve.
	B	3	2	2		2	1	3	2	4	Workplace as any other, just with a twist of extra security.
	C	2	3	3	Very active and down to earth approach.	3	1	3	4	4	It is an interesting workplace and how to get involved with the Embassy community activities is up to oneself. It is a good community to interact when possible.
	D	2	2	2	For the most part they seem to react promptly to crises to show that they care and and reassure colleagues.	2	1	1	4	2	Like I mentioned above, for me personally, it allows me to work with friends and colleagues from the same background and part of the world. Being a foreigner in Finland the Embassy community gives me the opportunity to interact and be with people whom I can relate to in a different way versus Finnish people. I believe there can be some improvements made to involve more interaction but for the most part if one is willing to be involved there are great opportunities in the Embassy community.
	E	4	4	3		1	2	2	1	1	I am very proud to be a member of the community. It really is a world of its own.
	F	3	2	4	hard to say	3	5	3	1	2	Somehow I love it!
	G	3	3	3		2	2	4	3	3	

1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree and

5=Strongly disagree